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SERMONS,

BY

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AND

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR,

By JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D.

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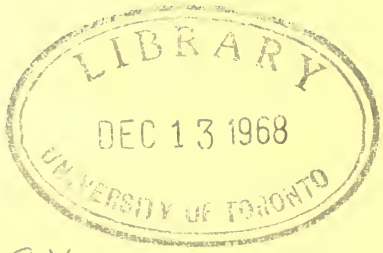

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TO THE

QUEEN.

MADAM,

WHEN the First Volume of these Sermons was published, I did not presume to resquest the liberty of prefixing to them a name so illustrious. Encouraged by the favourable manner in which the Publick has received Two Volumes,

I now humbly beg leave, on the publication of a Third, to lay them all before your MAJESTY.

Had I been in doubt to whom they could be presented with the greatest propriety, the publick voice would instantly have directed me to the Person to whom I have now the honour of addressing myself. Discourses intended to promote religion and virtue can be inscribed to none more suitably than to One who, in the highest station of life, has ever supported the cause of religion by her conspicuous regard for it; who, has advanced the interests of virtue, by her distinguished example; and who, by a happy union of the amiable with the estimable qualities, has commanded the

the love and the respect of a great nation.

It is a signal blessing to a kingdom, when a Person whose character would have reflected honour upon any condition of fortune, is placed by Providence in that elevated rank, which allows her virtues to shine with extensive lustre, and to diffuse their auspicious influence over a whole land.

That this influence of your MAJESTY'S virtues may long continue to be felt; that while they alleviate the cares, and increase the comfort of our gracious Sovereign; while they improve the minds, and contribute to the felicity of your illustrious offspring; they may, at the same time, successfully exert their

power in forming the publick manners on a pattern so worthy of imitation! ſhall be my ſincere wish and earnest prayer.

I have the honour to be, with profound respect,

MADAM,

Your MAJESTY's most humble,

And most devoted servant,

HUGH BLAIR.

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SERMON I.

On the True Honour of Man.

Proverbs, iv. 8.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour.—

THE love of honour is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. It shows itself in our earliest years; and is coëval with the first exertions of reason. It accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life; and in private stations discovers itself no less than in the higher ranks of society. In their ideas of what constitutes honour, men greatly vary, and often grossly err. But of somewhat which they conceive to form pre-eminence and

 distinction,

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distinction, all are desirous. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live; and to contempt and disgrace, none are insensible.

Among the advantages which attend religion and virtue, the honour which they confer on man is frequently mentioned in Scripture as one of the most considerable. *Wisdom is the principal thing*, says Solomon, in the passage where the Text lies, *therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* It is evident that throughout all the sacred writings, and particularly in the book of Proverbs, by *wisdom* is to be understood a principle of religion producing virtuous conduct. *The fear of the Lord* is said to be *the beginning of wisdom:* And by this fear of the Lord men are said to *depart from evil; to walk in the way of good men, and to keep the path*

Prov. ii. 20.

of

of the righteous. Man is then regulated by *the wisdom which is from above*, when he is formed by piety to the duties of virtue and morality; and of the wisdom which produces this effect, it is asserted in the Text, that it *bringeth us to honour.*

On this recommendation of religion it is the more necessary to fix our attention, because it is often refused to it by men of the world. Their notions of honour are apt to run in a very different channel. Wherever religion is mentioned, they connect with it ideas of melancholy and dejection, or of mean and feeble spirits. They perhaps admit that it may be useful to the multitude, as a principle of restraint from disorders and crimes; and that to persons of a peculiar turn of mind, it may afford consolation under the distresses of life; but from the active scenes of the world, and from those vigorous exertions which display to advantage the human abilities, they incline totally to exclude it. It may sooth the timid or the sad: But they consider it as having no connection with what is proper to raise men to ho-

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nour and distinction. I shall now endeavour to remove this reproach from religion; and to show that in every situation of human life, even in the highest stations, it forms the honour, as well as the happiness of man.

But first, let us be careful to ascertain what true religion is. I admit that there is a certain species of religion, (if we can give it that name,) which has no claim to such high distinction; when it is placed wholly in speculation and belief, in the regularity of external homage, or in fiery zeal about contested opinions. From a superstition inherent in the human mind, the religion of the multitude has always been tinctured with too much of this spirit. They serve God as they would serve a proud master, who may be flattered by their prostrations, appeased by their gifts, and gained by loud protestations of attachment to his interests, and of enmity to all whom they suppose to be his foes. But this is not that *wisdom* to which Solomon ascribes, in the Text, such high prerogatives. It is not the religion which we preach,

preach, nor the religion of Christ. That religion consists in the love of God and the love of man, grounded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer of the world, the Intercessor for the penitent, and the Patron of the virtuous; through whom we enjoy comfortable access to the Sovereign of the universe in the acts of worship and devotion. It consists in justice, humanity, and mercy; in a fair and candid mind, a generous and affectionate heart; accompanied with temperance, self-government, and a perpetual regard in all our actions to conscience, and to the law of God. A religious, and a thoroughly virtuous character, therefore, I consider as the same.

By the true honour of man is to be understood, not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart; what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species; what always creates esteem, and in its highest degree produces veneration. The question now before us

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is, From what cause this eminence arises? By what means is it to be attained?

I SAY, first, From riches it does not arise. These, we all know, may belong to the vilest of mankind. Providence has scattered them among the crowd with an undistinguishing hand, as of purpose to show of what small account they are in the sight of God. Experience every day proves that the possession of them is consistent with the most general contempt. On this point, therefore, I conceive it not necessary to insist any longer.

NEITHER does the honour of man arise from mere dignity of rank or office. Were such distinctions always, or even generally, obtained in consequence of uncommon merit, they would indeed confer honour on the character. But, in the present state of society, it is too well known that this is not the case. They are often the consequence of birth alone. They are sometimes the fruit of mere dependance and assiduity. They may be the recompence

pence of flattery, versatility, and intrigue; and so be conjoined with meanness and baseness of character. To persons graced with noble birth, or placed in high stations, much external honour is due. This is what the subordination of society necessarily requires; and what every good member of it will cheerfully yield. But how often has it happened that such persons, when externally respected, are, nevertheless, despised by men in their hearts; nay, sometimes execrated by the public? Their elevation, if they have been unworthy of it, is so far from procuring them true honour, that it only renders their insignificance, perhaps their infamy, more conspicuous. By drawing attention to their conduct, it discovers in the most glaring light how little they deserved the station which they possess.

I MUST next observe, That the proper honour of man arises not from some of those splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. Courage and prowess, military renown, signal victories

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and conquests, may render the name of a man famous, without rendering his character truly honourable. To many brave men, to many heroes renowned in story, we look up with wonder. Their exploits are recorded. Their praises are sung. They stand as on an eminence, above the rest of mankind. Their eminence, nevertheless, may not be of that sort before which we bow with inward esteem and respect. Something more is wanted for that purpose, than the conquering arm, and the intrepid mind. The laurels of the warrior must at all times be dyed in blood, and bedewed with the tears of the widow and the orphan. But if they have been stained by rapine and inhumanity; if sordid avarice has marked his character; or low and gross sensuality has degraded his life; the great hero sinks into a little man. What at a distance, or on a superficial view, we admire, becomes mean, perhaps odious, when we examine it more closely. It is like the colossal statue, whose immense size struck the spectator afar off with astonishment; but when nearly viewed,

ed, it appears disproportioned, unshapely, and rude.

Observations of the same kind may be applied to all the reputation derived from civil accomplishments; from the refined politics of the statesman; or the literary efforts of genius and erudition. These bestow, and, within certain bounds, ought to bestow, eminence and distinction on men. They discover talents which in themselves are shining; and which become highly valuable, when employed in advancing the good of mankind. Hence, they frequently give rise to fame. But a distinction is to be made between fame and true honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause, the latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude: Honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise while it withholds esteem: True honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents; the other looks up to the whole character. Hence the statesman, the orator, or the poet, may be famous; while yet

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yet the man himself is far from being honoured. We envy his abilities. We wish to rival them. But we would not choose to be classed with him who possessed them. Instances of this sort are too often found in every record of ancient or modern history.

From all this it follows, That, in order to discern where man's true honour lies, we must look, not to any adventitious circumstance of fortune; not to any single sparkling quality; but to the whole of what forms a man: what entitles him, as such, to rank high among that class of beings to which he belongs; in a word, we must look to the mind and the soul.——A mind superior to fear, to selfish interest and corruption; a mind governed by the principles of uniform rectitude and integrity; the same in prosperity and adversity; which no bribe can seduce, nor terror overawe; neither by pleasure melted into effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection; such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of men.

men.—One, who in no situation of life is either ashamed or afraid of discharging his duty, and acting his proper part with firmness and constancy; true to the God whom he worships, and true to the faith in which he professes to believe; full of affection to his brethren of mankind; faithful to his friends, generous to his enemies, warm with compassion to the unfortunate; self-denying to little private interests and pleasures, but zealous for public interest and happiness; magnanimous, without being proud; humble, without being mean; just, without being harsh: simple in his manners, but manly in his feelings; on whose word you can entirely rely; whose countenance never deceives you; whose professions of kindness are the effusions of his heart; one, in fine, whom, independent of any views of advantage, you would choose for a superiour, could trust in as a friend, and could love as a brother:—This is the man, whom in your heart, above all others, you do, you must, honour.

Such

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SUCH a character, imperfectly as it has now been drawn, all must acknowledge to be formed solely by the influence of steady religion and virtue. It is the effect of principles which, operating on conscience, determine it uniformly to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.* By those means, *wisdom*, as the Text asserts, bringeth us to honour.

Philip. iv. 8.

IN confirmation of this doctrine it is to be observed, that the honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of any thing foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect which it procures. Wherever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it

it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man, whom we respect. The honour which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one; let room only be given for his virtues to come forth and show themselves, and you will revere him as a private citizen; or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is, because there a nobler sphere of action is opened to him; because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion; and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace and adorn the station which he fills. Even in the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity: his remembered virtues continue to be honoured, when their active exertions are over; and to the last stage of life he is followed by public esteem and respect. Whereas, if genuine worth

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worth be wanting, the applause which may have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies away. Though, for a part of his life, he had dazzled the world, this was owing to his deficiency in the essential qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks in darkness.—There is, therefore, a standard of independent, intrinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end whatever claims to be honourable among men. By this we must measure it; and it will always be found, that nothing but what is essential to man has power to command the respect of man's heart.

It is to be farther observed, That the universal consent of mankind in honouring real virtue, is sufficient to show what the genuine sense of human nature is on this subject. All other claims of honour are ambulatory and changeable. The degrees of respect paid to external stations vary with forms of government, and fashions of the times. Qualities which in one

one country are highly honoured, in another are lightly esteemed. Nay, what in some regions of the earth distinguishes a man above others, might elsewhere expose him to contempt or ridicule. But where was ever the nation on the face of the globe, who did not honour unblemished worth, unaffected piety, stedfast, humane, and regular virtue? To whom were altars erected in the Heathen world, but to those whom their merits and heroic labours, by their invention of useful arts, or by some signal acts of beneficence to their country, or to mankind, were found worthy, in their opinion, to be transferred from among men, and added to the number of the gods? ——Even the counterfeited appearances of virtue, which are so often found in the world, are testimonies to its praise. The hypocrite knows that, without assuming the garb of virtue, every other advantage he can possess, is insufficient to procure him esteem. Interference of interest, or perversity of disposition, may occasionally lead individuals to oppose, even to hate, the upright and the good. But

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But however the characters of such persons may be mistaken or misrepresented, yet, as far as they are acknowledged to be virtuous, the profligate dare not traduce them. Genuine virtue has a language that speaks to every heart throughout the world. It is a language which is understood by all. In every region, every clime, the homage paid to it is the same. In no one sentiment were ever mankind more generally agreed.

Finally, The honour acquired by religion and virtue is honour divine and immortal. It is honour, not in the estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers a *crown of glory that fadeth not away.* All the honour we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honour which is founded on true goodness, accompanies us through the whole progress of our existence. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten

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brighten throughout eternal ages. What procured him respect on earth, shall render him estimable among the great assembly of angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect;* where, we are assured, they who have been eminent in righteousness shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.*—Earthly honours are both short-lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honour which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from heaven; and is likened, in Scripture, to *the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* Whereas the honours which the world confers, resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always wasting, and soon dies totally away.

Dan. xii. 3.

2 Samuel, xxiii. 4.

Prov. iv. 18.

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LET him, therefore, who retains any sense of human dignity; who feels within him that desire of honour which is congenial to man, aspire to the gratification of this passion by methods which are worthy of his nature. Let him not rest on any of those external distinctions which vanity has contrived to introduce. These can procure him no more than the semblance of respect. Let him not be flattered by the applause which some occasional display of abilities may have gained him. That applause may be mingled with contempt. Let him look to what will dignify his character as a man. Let him cultivate those moral qualities which all men in their hearts respect. *Wisdom* shall then *give to his head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to him.* This is an honour to which all may aspire. It is a prize for which every one, whether of high or low rank, may contend. It is always in his power so to distinguish himself by worthy and virtuous conduct, as to command the respect of those around him; and, what is highest of all, to obtain praise and honour from God.

LET

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LET no one imagine that in the religious part of this character there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy shade, or derogates from that esteem which men are generally disposed to yield to exemplary virtues. False ideas may be entertained of religion; as false and imperfect conceptions of virtue have often prevailed in the world. But to true religion there belongs no sullen gloom; no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw men from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue. On the contrary, the religious principle, rightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues, but supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far from obscuring the lustre of a character, that it heightens and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august. To the decorations of a palace, it joins the majesty of a temple.

He who divides religion from virtue, understands neither the one nor the other. It is the union of the two, which consum-

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mates the human character and state. It is their union which has distinguished those great and illustrious men, who have shone with so much honour in former ages; and whose memory lives in the remembrance of succeeding generations. It is their union which forms that *wisdom which is from above;* that wisdom to which the Text ascribes such high effects; and to which belongs the sublime encomium given of it by an author of one of the apocryphal books of Scripture; with whose beautiful and emphatical expressions I conclude this Discourse. *The memorial of virtue is immortal. It is known with God, and with men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it: It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards. Wisdom is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: Therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. She is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of the power of God; and the image of his*

Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1, 2.

vii. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

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his goodness. Remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets: For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun; and above all the order of the stars: Being compared with light, she is found before it.

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On Sensibility.

Romans, xii. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

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THE amiable spirit of our holy religion appears in nothing more than in the care it hath taken to enforce on men the social duties of life. This is one of the clearest characteristics of its being a religion whose origin is divine: For every doctrine which proceeds from the Father of mercies will undoubtedly breath benevolence and humanity. This is the scope of the two exhortations in the Text, to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep;* the one calculated to promote the happiness, the other to alleviate the sorrows,

rows, of our fellow creatures; both concurring to form that temper which interests us in the concerns of our brethren; which disposes us to feel along with them, to take part in their joys, and in their sorrows. This temper is known by the name of Sensibility; a word which in modern times we hear in the mouth of every one; a quality which every one affects to possess; in itself a most amiable and worthy disposition of mind, but often mistaken and abused; employed as a cover, sometimes to a capricious humour, sometimes to selfish passions. I shall endeavour to explain the nature of true sensibility. I shall consider its effects; and, after showing its advantages, shall point out the abuses and mistaken forms of this virtue.

The original constitution of our nature with respect to the mixture of selfish and social affections, discovers in this, as in every other part of our frame, profound and admirable wisdom. Each individual is, by his Creator, committed particularly to himself, and his own care. He

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has it more in his power to promote his own welfare, than any other person can possibly have to promote it. It was therefore fit, it was necessary, that, in each individual, self-love should be the strongest and most active instinct. This self-love, if he had been a being who stood solitary and alone, might have proved sufficient for the purpose both of his preservation and his welfare. But such is not the situation of man. He is mixed among multitudes of the same nature. In these multitudes, the self-love of one man, or attention to his particular interest, encountering the self-love and the interests of another, could not but produce frequent opposition, and innumerable mischiefs. It was necessary, therefore, to provide a counterbalance to this part of his nature; which is accordingly done by implanting in him those social and benevolent instincts which lead him in some measure out of himself, to follow the interest of others. The strength of these social instincts is, in general, proportioned to their importance in human life. Hence that degree of sensibility

bility which prompts us to *weep with them that weep*, is stronger than that which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice;* for this reason, that the unhappy stand more in need of our fellow-feeling and assistance than the prosperous. Still, however, it was requisite, that, in each individual, the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance to the preservation of his life and well-being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to engross his attention, and to carry him into criminal excesses, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles, which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility of which we now treat.

That it constitutes an essential part of a religious character, there can be no doubt. Not only are the words of the Text express to this purpose, but the whole

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whole New Testament abounds with passages which enjoin the cultivation of this disposition. Being *all one body, and members one of another*, we are commanded to *love our neighbour as ourself; to look every man, not on his own things only, but on those of others also; to be pitiful, to be courteous, to be tender-hearted; to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.* The dispositions opposite to sensibility are cruelty, hardness of heart, contracted attachment to worldly interests; which every one will admit to be directly opposite to the Christian character. According to the different degrees of constitutional warmth in men's affections, sensibility may, even among the virtuous, prevail in different proportions. For all derive not from nature the same happy delicacy, and tenderness of feeling. With some, the heart melts, and relents, in kind emotions, much more easily than with others. But with every one who aspires at the character of a good man, it is necessary that the humane and compassionate dispositions should be found. There must be

Luke, x. 27.

Philip. ii. 4.

1 Pet. iii. 8. Eph. iv. 23. Galat. vi. 2.

be that within him which shall form him to feel in some degree with the heart of a brother; and when he beholds others enjoying happiness, or sees them sunk in sorrow, shall bring his affections to accord, and, if we may speak so, to sound a note in unison to theirs. This is to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep*. How much this temper belongs to the perfection of our nature, we learn from one who exhibited that perfection in its highest degree. When our Lord Jesus, on a certain occasion, came to the grave of a beloved friend, and saw his relations mourning around it, he presently caught the impression of their sorrow; *he groaned in spirit, and was troubled.* He knew that he was about to remove the cause of their distress, by recalling Lazarus to life: Yet, in the moment of grief, his heart sympathised with theirs; and, together with the weeping friends, *Jesus wept.* John, xi. 35.

Let us next proceed to consider the effect of this virtuous sensibility on our character,

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racter, and our state. I shall consider it in two views; its influence on our moral conduct, and its influence on our happiness.

First, It powerfully influences the proper discharge of all the relative and social duties of life. Without some discharge of those duties, there could be no comfort or security in human society. Men would become hordes of savages, perpetually harassing one another. In one way or other, therefore, the great duties of social life must be performed. There must be among mankind some reciprocal co-operation and aid. In this, all consent. But let us observe, that these duties may be performed from different principles, and in different ways. Sometimes they are performed merely from decency, and regard to character; sometimes from fear, and even from selfishness, which obliges men to show kindness, in order that they may receive returns of it. In such cases, the exteriour of fair behaviour may be preserved. But all will admit, that when

from

from constraint only the offices of seeming kindness are performed, little dependance can be placed on them, and little value allowed to them.

By others, these offices are discharged solely from a principle of duty. They are men of cold affections, and perhaps of an interested character. But, overawed by a sense of religion, and convinced that they are bound to be beneficent, they fulfil the course of relative duties with regular tenour. Such men act from conscience and principle. So far they do well, and are worthy of praise. They assist their friends; they give to the poor; they do justice to all. But what a different complexion is given to the same actions, how much higher flavour do they acquire, when they flow from the sensibility of a feeling heart! If one be not moved by affection, even supposing him influenced by principle, he will go no farther than strict principle appears to require. He will advance slowly, and reluctantly. As it is justice, not generosity, which impels him, he will often feel as a task what he is required by conscience to perform.

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perform. Whereas, to him who is prompted by virtuous sensibility, every office of beneficence and humanity is a pleasure. He gives, assists, and relieves, not merely because he is bound to do so, but because it would be painful for him to refrain. Hence, the smallest benefit he confers rises in its value, on account of its carrying the affection of the giver impressed upon the gift. It speaks his heart; and the discovery of the heart is very frequently of greater consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How often will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden the humble, and raise the dejected? How often will the look of tender sympathy, or the tear that involuntarily falls, impart consolation to the unhappy? By means of this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties which we owe to one another, are both performed to more advantage, and endeared in the performance. From true sensibility flow a thousand good offices, apparently small in themselves, but of high importance to the felicity of others; offices which altogether escape the

the observation of the cold and unfeeling, who, by the hardness of their manner, render themselves unamiable, even when they mean to do good. How happy, then, would it be for mankind, if this affectionate disposition prevailed more generally in the world! How much would the sum of public virtue and public felicity be increased, if men were always inclined to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep!*

But, besides the effect of such a temper on general virtue and happiness, let us consider its effect on the happiness of him who possesses it, and the various pleasures to which it gives him access. If he be master of riches or influence, it affords him the means of increasing his own enjoyment, by relieving the wants, or increasing the comforts, of others. If he command not these advantages, yet all the comforts which he sees in the possession of the deserving, become in some sort his, by his rejoicing in the good which they enjoy. Even the face of nature yields

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yields a satisfaction to him which the insensible can never know. The profusion of goodness which he beholds poured forth on the universe, dilates his heart with the thought that innumerable multitudes around him are blest and happy. When he sees the labours of men appearing to prosper, and views a country flourishing in wealth and industry; when he beholds the spring coming forth in its beauty, and reviving the decayed face of nature; or in autumn beholds the fields loaded with plenty, and the year crowned with all its fruits; he lifts his affections with gratitude to the great Father of all, and rejoices in the general felicity and joy.

It may indeed be objected, that the same sensibility lays open the heart to be pierced with many wounds from the distresses which abound in the world; exposes us to frequent suffering from the participation which it communicates, of the sorrows, as well as of the joys of friendship. But let it be considered, that the tender melancholy of sympathy is accompanied with

with a sensation, which they who feel it would not exchange for the gratifications of the selfish. When the heart is strongly moved by any of the kind affections, even when it pours itself forth in virtuous sorrow, a secret attractive charm mingles with the painful emotion; there is a joy in the midst of grief. Let it be farther considered, that the griefs which sensibility introduces are counterbalanced by pleasures which flow from the same source. Sensibility heightens in general the human powers, and is connected with acuteness in all our feelings. If it makes us more alive to some painful sensations, in return it renders the pleasing ones more vivid and animated. The selfish man languishes in his narrow circle of pleasures. They are confined to what affects his own interest. He is obliged to repeat the same gratifications, till they become insipid. But the man of virtuous sensibility moves in a wider sphere of felicity. His powers are much more frequently called forth into occupations of pleasing activity. Numberless occasions open to him, of indulging

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his favourite taste, by conveying satisfaction to others. Often it is in his power, in one way or other, to sooth the afflicted heart, to carry some consolation into the house of woe. In the scenes of ordinary life, in the domestic and social intercourses of men, the cordiality of his affections cheers and gladdens him. Every appearance, every description of innocent happiness, is enjoyed by him. Every native expression of kindness and affection among others, is felt by him, even though he be not the object of it. Among a circle of friends, enjoying one another, he is as happy as the happiest. In a word, he lives in a different sort of world from what the selfish man inhabits. He possesses a new sense, which enables him to behold objects which the selfish cannot see. At the same time, his enjoyments are not of that kind which remain merely on the surface of the mind. They penetrate the heart. They enlarge and elevate, they refine and ennoble it. To all the pleasing emotions of affection, they add the dignified consciousness of virtue.——Children of

of Men! Men formed by nature to live and to feel as brethren! How long will ye continue to estrange yourselves from one another by competitions and jealousies, when in cordial union ye might be so much more blest? How long will ye seek your happiness in selfish gratifications alone, neglecting those purer and better sources of joy, which flow from the affections and the heart?

HAVING now explained the nature, and shown the value and high advantages of true sensibility, I proceed to point out some of the mistaken forms, and abuses of this virtue.——In modern times, the chief improvement of which we have to boast, is a sense of humanity. This, notwithstanding the selfishness that still prevails, is the favourite and distinguishing virtue of the age. On general manners, and on several departments of society, it has had considerable influence. It has abated the spirit of persecution; it has even tempered the horrors of war; and man is now more ashamed, than he was in

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some former ages, of acting as a savage to man. Hence, sensibility is become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed when the reality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility. Sensibility indeed tends to produce gentleness in behaviour; and when such behaviour flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exteriour manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart. Professions of sensibility on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language, afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character. Frequently, under a negligent and seemingly rough manner, there lies a tender and feeling heart. Manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are for the most part generous and humane; while the soft and effeminate

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are hardly capable of any vigorous exertion of affection.

As sensibility supposes delicacy of feeling with respect to others, they who affect the highest sensibility are apt to carry this delicacy to excess. They are, perhaps, not incapable of the warmth of disinterested friendship; but they are become so refined in all their sensations; they entertain such high notions of what ought to correspond in the feelings of others to their own; they are so mightily hurt by every thing which comes not up to their ideal standard of reciprocal affection, as to produce disquiet and uneasiness to all with whom they are connected. Hence, unjust suspicions of their friends; hence, groundless upbraidings and complaints of unkindness; hence, a proneness to take violent offence at trifles. In consequence of examining their friends with a microscopic eye, what to an ordinary observer would not be unpleasing, to them is grating and disgusting. At the bottom of the character of such persons, there always lie

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much pride and attention to themselves. This is indeed a false species of sensibility. It is the substitution of a capricious and irritable delicacy, in the room of that plain and native tenderness of heart, which prompts men to view others with an indulgent eye, and to make great allowances for the imperfections which are sometimes adherent to the most amiable qualities.

THERE are others who affect not sensibility to this extreme, but who found high claims to themselves upon the degree of interest which they take in the concerns of others. Although their sensibility can produce no benefit to the person who is its object, they always conceive that it entitles themselves to some profitable returns. These, often, are persons of refined and artful character; who partly deceive themselves, and partly employ their sensibility as a cover to interest. He who acts from genuine affection, when he is feeling along with others in their joys or sorrows, thinks not of any recompence to which this gives him

him a title. He follows the impulse of his heart. He obeys the dictates of his nature; just as the vine by its nature produces fruit, and the fountain pours forth its streams. Wherever views of interest, and prospects of return, mingle with the feelings of affection, sensibility acts an imperfect part, and entitles us to small share of praise.

But, supposing it to be both complete and pure, I must caution you against resting the whole merit of your character on sensibility alone. It is indeed a happy constitution of mind. It fits men for the proper discharge of many duties, and gives them access to many virtuous pleasures. It is requisite for our acceptance either with God or man. At the same time, if it remain an instinctive feeling alone, it will form no more than an imperfect character. Complete virtue is of a more exalted and dignified nature. It supposes sensibility, good temper, and benevolent affections; it includes them as essential parts; but it reaches farther: It supposes

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them to be strengthened and confirmed by principle; it requires them to be supported by justice, temperance, fortitude, and all those other virtues which enable us to act with propriety in the trying situations of life.

It is very possible for a man to possess the kind affections in a high degree, while at the same time he is carried away by passion and pleasure into many criminal deeds. Almost every man values himself on possessing virtue in one or other of its forms. He wishes to lay claim to some quality which will render him estimable in his own eye, as well as in that of the public. Hence it is common for many, especially for those in the higher classes of life, to take much praise to themselves on account of their sensibility, though it be, in truth, a sensibility of a very defective kind. They relent at the view of misery when it is strongly set before them. Often too, affected chiefly by the powers of description, it is at feigned and pictured distress, more than at real misery, that they relent. The tears which they shed upon

upon these occasions, they consider as undoubted proofs of virtue. They applaud themselves for the goodness of their hearts; and conclude, that with such feelings they cannot fail to be agreeable to Heaven. At the same time, these transient relentings make slight impression on conduct. They give rise to few, if any, good deeds; and soon after such persons have wept at some tragical tale, they are ready to stretch forth the hand of oppression, to grasp at the gain of injustice, or to plunge into the torrent of criminal pleasures. This sort of sensibility affords no more than a fallacious claim to virtue, and gives men no ground to think highly of themselves. We must inquire, not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character.

I SHALL conclude with observing, that sensibility, when genuine and pure, has a strong connection with piety. That warmth of affection and tenderness of heart, which lead men to feel for their brethren, and to enter into their joys and sorrows, should naturally

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naturally dispose them to melt at the remembrance of the Divine goodness; to glow with admiration of the Divine Majesty; to send up the voice of praise and adoration to that Supreme Being who makes his creatures happy. He who pretends to great sensibility towards men, and yet has no feeling for the high objects of religion, no heart to admire and adore the great Father of the universe, has reason to distrust the truth and delicacy of his sensibility. He has reason to suspect, that in some corner of his heart there lodges a secret depravity, an unnatural hardness and callousness, which vitiate his character.——Let us study to join all the parts of virtue in proper union; to be consistently and uniformly good; just and upright, as well as pitiful and courteous; pious, as well as sympathising. Let us pray to Him who made the heart, that he would fill it with all proper dispositions; rectify all its errours; and render it the happy abode of personal integrity and social tenderness, of purity, benevolence, and devotion.

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On the Improvement of Time.

Genesis, xlvii. 8.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious meditation. There is nothing in the management of which, wisdom is more requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency more. In its particular parcels, they appear entirely careless of it; and throw it away with thoughtless profusion. But, when collected into some of its great portions, and viewed as the measure of their continuance in life, they become sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with a serious eye. While day after

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after day is wasted in a course of idleness or vicious pleasures, if some incident shall occur which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life; how much of it is gone; at what period of it he is now arrived; and to what proportion of it he can with any probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his state. Happy, if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst the succeeding cares and pleasures of the world! To the good old Patriarch mentioned in the Text, we have reason to believe that such impressions were habitual. The question put to him by the Egyptian monarch produced, in his answer, such reflections as were naturally suited to his time of life. *And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the*

the days of their pilgrimage. But the peculiar circumstances of the Patriarch, or the number of his years, are not to be the subject of our present consideration. My purpose is to show how we should be affected in every period of human life, by reflection upon our age, whether we be young or advanced in years; in order that the question, *How old art thou?* may never be put to any of us without some good effect. There are three different portions of our life which such a question naturally calls to view; that part of it which is past; that which is now present; and that to which we fondly look forward, as future. Let us consider in what manner we ought to be affected by attending to each of these.

I. Let us review that part of our time which is past. According to the progress which we have made in the journey of life, the field which past years present to our review will be more or less extensive. But to every one they will be found to afford sufficient matter of humiliation and regret.

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For where is the person who, having acted for any time in the world, remembers not many errours and many follies in his past behaviour? Who dares to say, that he has improved, as he might have done, the various advantages which were afforded him; and that he recalls nothing for which he has reason either to grieve, or to blush? When we recollect the several stages of life through which we have passed; the successive occupations in which we have been engaged, the designs we have formed, and the hopes and fears which alternately have filled our breast; how barren for most part is the remembrance; and how few traces of any thing valuable or important remain! Like characters drawn on the sand, which the next wave washes totally away; so one trivial succession of events has effaced the memory of the preceding; and though we have seemed all along to be busy, yet for much of what we have acted, we are neither wiser nor better than if such actions had never been. Hence let the retrospect of what is past produce, as its first effect, humiliation

tion in our own eyes, and abasement before God. Much do human pride and self-complacency require some correction; and that correction is never more effectually administered, than by an impartial and serious review of former life.

But, though past time be gone, we are not to consider it as irredeemably lost. To a very profitable purpose it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it remains in remembrance, and oblige it to contribute to future improvement. If you have gained nothing more by the years that are past, you have at least gained experience; and experience is the mother of wisdom. You have seen the weak parts of your character; and may have discovered the chief sources of your misconduct. To these, let your attention be directed; on these, let the proper guards be set. If you have trifled long, resolve to trifle no more. If your passions have often betrayed and degraded you, study how they may be kept, in future, under better discipline. Learn, at the same time, never to trust presumptuously in your own wisdom.

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wisdom. Humbly apply to the Author of your being, and beseech his grace to guide you safely through those slippery and dangerous paths, in which experience has shown that you are so ready to err, and to fall.

In reviewing past life, it cannot but occur, that many things now appear of inconsiderable importance, which once occupied and attached us, in the highest degree. Where are those keen competitions, those mortifying disappointments, those violent enmities, those eager pursuits, which we once thought were to last for ever, and on which we considered our whole happiness or misery as suspended? We look back upon them now, as upon a dream which has passed away. None of those mighty consequences have followed which we had predicted. The airy fabric has vanished, and left no trace behind it. We smile at our former violence; and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great. We may rest assured, that what hath been shall again be. When time shall once have

have laid his lenient hand on the passions and pursuits of the present moment, they too shall lose that imaginary value which heated fancy now bestows upon them. Hence, let them already begin to subside to their proper level. Let wisdom infuse a tincture of moderation into the eagerness of contest, by anticipating that period of coolness, which the lapse of time will, of itself, certainly bring.——When we look back on years that are past, how swiftly do they appear to have fleeted away! How insensibly has one period of life stolen upon us after another, like the successive incidents in *a tale that is told!* Before we were aware, childhood had grown up into youth; youth had passed into manhood; and manhood now, perhaps, begins to assume the grey hair, and to decline into old age. When we are carrying our views forward, months and years to come seem to stretch through a long and extensive space. But when the time shall arrive of our looking back, they shall appear contracted within narrow bounds. Time, when yet before us,

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seems to advance with slow and tardy steps; no sooner is it past, than we discern its wings.

It is a remarkable peculiarity in the retrospect of former life, that it is commonly attended with some measure of heaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the memory of joys that are past is accompanied with secret sorrow. In the days of former years, many objects arise to view, which make the most unthinking, grave; and render the serious, sad. The pleasurable scenes of youth, the objects on which our affections had been early placed, the companions and friends with whom we had spent many happy days, even the places and the occupations to which we had been long accustomed, but to which we have now bidden farewell, can hardly ever be recalled, without softening, nor, sometimes, without piercing the heart. Such sensations, to which few, if any, of my hearers are wholly strangers, I now mention, as affording a strong proof of that vanity of the human state, which is often represented

sented in the sacred writings: And vain indeed must that state be, where shades of grief tinge the recollection of its brightest scenes. But, at the same time, though it be very proper that such meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet on them I advise not the gentle and tender heart to dwell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless melancholy; to deject, without bringing much improvement; to thicken the gloom which already hangs over human life, without furnishing proportionable assistance to virtue.

Let me advise you, rather to recal to view such parts of former conduct, if any such there be, as afford in the remembrance a rational satisfaction. And what parts of conduct are these? Are they the pursuits of sensual pleasure, the riots of jollity, or the displays of show and vanity? No: I appeal to your hearts, my friends, if what you recollect with most pleasure be not the innocent, the virtuous, the honourable parts of your past life; when you were employed in cultivating your minds, and improving them with useful know-

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ledge; when, by regular application and persevering labour, you were laying the foundation of future reputation and advancement; when you were occupied in discharging with fidelity the duties of your station, and acquiring the esteem of the worthy and the good; when, in some trying situation, you were enabled to act your part with firmness and honour; or had seized the happy opportunity of assisting the deserving, of relieving the distressed, and bringing down upon your heads the *blessings of those that were ready to perish.*—These, these are the parts of former life which are recalled with most satisfaction! On them alone, no heaviness of heart attends. You enjoy them as a treasure which is now stored up, and put beyond all danger of being lost. These cheer the hours of sadness, lighten the burden of old age, and, through the mortifying remembrance of much of the past, dart a ray of light and joy.—From the review of these, and the comparison of them with the deceitful pleasures of sin, let us learn how to form our estimate of

of happiness. Let us learn what is true, what is false, in human pleasures; and from experience of the past, judge of the quarter to which we must in future turn, if we would lay a foundation for permanent satisfaction. After having thus reviewed the former years of our life, let us consider,

II. WHAT attention is due to that period of age in which we are at present placed. Here lies the immediate and principal object of our concern: For the recollection of the past is only as far of moment, as it acts upon the present. The past, to us now, is little; the future, as yet, is nothing. Between these two great gulphs of time subsists the present, as an isthmus or bridge, along which we are all passing. With hasty and inconsiderate steps let us not pass along it; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding a steady and properly conducted course. *Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it now with all thy might; for now is the accepted time; now is the*

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day of salvation. Many directions might be given for the wise and religious improvement of the present; a few of which only I shall hint.

Let us begin with excluding those superfluous avocations which unprofitably consume it. Life is short; much that is of real importance remains to be done. If we suffer the present time to be wasted, either in absolute idleness or in frivolous employments, it will hereafter call for vengeance against us. Removing, therefore, what is merely superfluous, let us bethink ourselves of what is most material to be attended to at present: As, first and chief, the great work of our salvation; the discharge of the religious duties which we owe to God our Creator, and to Christ our Redeemer. *God waiteth as yet to be gracious*; whether he will wait longer, none of us can tell. Now, therefore, *seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.* Our spiritual interests will be best promoted by regular performance of all the duties of ordinary life. Let these, therefore, occupy a great share

share of the present hour. Whatever our age, our character, our profession, or station in the world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving day find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow, what reason and conscience tell you ought to be performed to-day. To-morrow is not your's; and though you should live to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden not its own. *Sufficient for the day will prove the duty thereof.*

The observance of order and method, is of high consequence for the improvement of present time. He who performs every employment in its due place and season, suffers no part of time to escape without profit. He multiplies his days; for he lives much in little space. Whereas he who neglects order in the arrangement of his occupations, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying, in vain, to recover it when gone.—Let me advise you frequently to make the present employment of time an object of thought. Ask yourselves, about what are you now busied? What is the ultimate

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scope of your present pursuits and cares? Can you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will survive the moment, and bring forth some fruit for futurity? He who can give no satisfactory answer to such questions as these, has reason to suspect that his employment of the present is not tending either to his advantage, or his honour.—— Finally, let me admonish you, that, while you study to improve, you should endeavour also to enjoy, the present hour. Let it not be disturbed with groundless discontents, or poisoned with foolish anxieties about what is to come: But look up to Heaven, and acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the actual blessings you enjoy. If you must admit, that you are now in health, peace, and safety; without any particular or uncommon evils to afflict your condition; what more can you reasonably look for in this vain and uncertain world? How little can the greatest prosperity add to such a state? Will any future situation ever make you happy, if now, with so few causes of grief, you imagine yourselves

selves miserable? The evil lies in the state of your mind, not in your condition of fortune; and by no alteration of circumstances is likely to be remedied. Let us now,

III. Consider with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Merely to look forward to them, is what requires no admonition. Futurity is the great object on which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which the past is forgotten, and the present too often neglected. All time is in a manner swallowed up by it. On futurity men build their designs; on futurity, they rest their hopes; and though not happy at the present, they always reckon on becoming so, at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward was, for wise purposes, implanted in the human breast. It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately

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derately indulged and grossly abused. The curiosity which sometimes prompts persons to inquire, by unlawful methods, into what is to come, is equally foolish and sinful. Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allowed us, into that dark and unknown region. Futurity belongs to God; and happy for us is that mysterious veil, with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals, many and many a thorn we should plant in our breasts. The proper and rational conduct of men with regard to futurity, is regulated by two considerations: First, that much of what it contains, must remain to us absolutely unknown; next, that there are also some events in which it may be certainly known and foreseen.

First, Much of futurity is, and must be, entirely unknown to us. When we speculate about the continuance of our life, and the events which are to fill it, we behold a river which is always flowing; but which soon escapes out of our sight,

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and is covered with mists and darkness. Some of its windings we may endeavour to trace; but it is only for a very short way that we are able to pursue them. In endless conjectures we quickly find ourselves bewildered; and, often, the next event that happens baffles all the reasonings we had formed concerning the succession of events. The consequence which follows from this is, that all the anxiety about futurity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution, is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are indeed necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to rush forward inconsiderate and headlong. We must make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare; and guard against dangers which apparently threaten. But having done this, we must stop; and leave the rest to Him who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He who sitteth in the heavens laughs* at the wisdom and the plans of worldly men. Wherefore *boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* For the same

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same reason, despair not of to-morrow; for it may bring forth good as well as evil. Vex not yourselves with imaginary fears. The impending black cloud, to which you look up with so much dread, may pass by harmless; or though it should discharge the storm, yet, before it breaks, you may be lodged in that lowly mansion which no storms ever touch.

In the next place, There are in futurity some events which may be certainly foretold by us, through all its darkness. First, it may be confidently predicted, that no situation into which it will bring us, shall ever answer fully to our hopes, or confer perfect happiness. This is certain as if we already saw it, that life, in its future periods, will continue to be what it has heretofore been; that it will be a mixed and varied state; a checquered scene of pleasures and pains, of fugitive joys and transient griefs, succeeding in a round to one another. Whether we look forward to the years of youth, or to those of manhood and advanced life, it is all the same. The world will be to us, what it has been to generations

generations past. Set out, therefore, on what remains of your journey, under this persuasion. According to this measure, estimate your future pleasures; and calculate your future gains. Carry always along with you, a modest and a temperate mind. Let not your expectations from the years that are to come rise too high; and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported.

Farther; This may be reckoned upon as certain, that, in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well-ordered mind, and a humble trust in the favour of Heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness. In reflecting upon the past, you have found this to hold. Assure yourselves that, in future, the case will be the same. The principal correctives of human vanity and distress, must be sought for in religion and virtue. Entering on paths which to you are new and unknown, place yourselves under the conduct of a Divine guide. Follow the great *Shepherd of Israel*, who, amidst the turmoil of this world, leads his flock *into green*

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green pastures, and by the still waters. As you advance in life, study to improve both in good principles and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you regularly employed in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord your God.*

Lastly, Whatever other things may be dubious in futurity, two great events are undoubtedly certain, death and judgment. These, we all know, are to terminate the whole course of time; and we know them to be not only certain, but to be approaching nearer to us, in consequence of every day that passes over our heads. To these, therefore, let us look forward, not with the dread of children, but with that manly seriousness which belongs to men and Christians. Let us not avert our view from them, as if we could place them at some greater distance by excluding them from our thoughts. This, indeed, is the refuge of too many; but it is the refuge of fools, who aggravate thereby the terrours they must encounter. For *he that cometh,*

cometh, shall come, and will not tarry. To his coming, let us look with a steady eye; and as life advances through its progressive stages, prepare for its close, and for appearing before Him who made us.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out the reflections proper to be made, when the question is put to any of us, *How old art thou?* I have shown with what eye we should review the past years of our life; in what light we should consider the present; and with what dispositions look forward to the future: In order that such a question may always leave some serious impression behind it; and may dispose us *so to number* the years of our life, *that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

SERMON IV.

On the Duties belonging to Middle Age.

1 Corinthians, xiii. 11.

——*When I became a man, I put away childish things.*

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To every thing, says the wise man, *there is a season; and a time to every purpose under heaven.* As there are duties which belong to particular situations of fortune, so there are duties also which result from particular periods of human life. In every period of it, indeed, that comprehensive rule takes place, *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.* Piety to God, and charity to men, are incumbent upon persons of every age, as soon as they can think and act. Yet

Eccles. iii. 1.

Eccles. xii. 13.

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Yet these virtues, in different stages of life, assume different forms; and when they appear in that form which is most suited to our age, they appear with peculiar gracefulness; they give propriety to conduct, and add dignity to character. In former Discourses, I have treated of the virtues which adorn youth, and of the duties which specially belong to old age. The circle of those duties which respect middle age, is indeed much larger. As that is the busy period in the life of man, it includes in effect the whole compass of religion, and therefore cannot have its peculiar character so definitely marked and ascertained. At the same time, during those years wherein one is sensible that he has advanced beyond the confines of youth, but has not yet passed into the region of old age, there are several things which reflection on that portion of human life suggests, or at least ought to suggest, to the mind. Inconsiderate must he be, who, in his gradual progress throughout middle age, pauses not, at times, to think how far he is now receding from youth;

See Vol. I. Sermons XI. and XII.

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how near he draws to the borders of declining age; what part it is now incumbent on him to act; what duties both God and the world have a title to expect from him. To these I am at present to call your attention; as what materially concern the greatest part of those who are now my hearers.

I. I BEGIN with observing, that the first duty of those who are become men, is, as the Text expresses it, to *put away childish things*. The season of youthful levities, follies, and passions, is now over. These have had their reign; a reign perhaps too long; and to which a termination is certainly proper at last. Much indulgence is due to youth. Many things admit of excuse then, which afterwards become unpardonable. Some things may even be graceful in youth, which, if not criminal, are at least ridiculous, in persons of maturer years. It is a great trial of wisdom, to make our retreat from youth with propriety; to assume the character of manhood, without exposing ourselves to reproach,

proach, by an unseasonable remainder of juvenility on the one hand, or by precise and disgusting formality on the other. Nature has placed certain boundaries, by which she discriminates the pleasures, actions, and employments, that are suited to the different stages of human life. It becomes us neither to overleap those boundaries, by a transition too hasty and violent; nor to hover too long on one side of the limit, when nature calls us to pass over to the other.

There are particularly two things in which middle age should preserve its distinction and separation from youth; these are levities of behaviour, and intemperate indulgence of pleasure. The gay spirits of the young often prompt an inconsiderate degree of levity, sometimes amusing, sometimes offensive; but for which, though betraying them occasionally into serious dangers, their want of experience may plead excuse. A more composed and manly behaviour is expected in riper years. The affectation of youthful vanities degrades the dignity of manhood; even

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renders its manners less agreeable; and, by awkward attempts to please, produces contempt. Cheerfulness is becoming in every age. But the proper cheerfulness of a man is as different from the levity of the boy, as the flight of the eagle is from the fluttering of a sparrow in the air.

As all unseasonable returns to the levity of youth ought to be laid aside,—an admonition which equally belongs to both the sexes,—still more are we to guard against those intemperate indulgences of pleasure, to which the young are unhappily prone. From these we cannot too soon retreat. They open the path to ruin, in every period of our days. As long, however, as these excesses are confined to the first stage of life, hope is left, that when this fever of the spirits shall abate, sobriety may gain the ascendant, and wiser counsels have power to influence conduct. But after the season of youth is past, if its intemperate spirit remain; if, instead of listening to the calls of honour, and bending attention to the cares and the business of men, the same course of idleness

idleness and sensuality continue to be pursued, the case becomes more desperate. A sad presumption arises, that long immaturity is to prevail; and that the pleasures and passions of the youth are to sink and overwhelm the man. Difficult, I confess, it may prove to overcome the attachments which youthful habits had for a long while been forming. Hard, at the beginning, is the task, to impose on our conduct restraints which are altogether unaccustomed and new. But this is a trial which every one must undergo, in entering on new scenes of action, and new periods of life. Let those who are in this situation bethink themselves, that all is now at stake. Their character and honour, their future fortune and success in the world, depend in a great measure on the steps they take, when first they appear on the stage of active life. The world then looks to them with an observing eye. It studies their behaviour; and interprets all their motions, as presages of the line of future conduct which they mean to hold. Now, therefore, *put away*

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childish things; dismiss your former trifling amusements, and youthful pleasures; blast not the hopes which your friends are willing to conceive of you. Higher occupations, more serious cares, await you. Turn your mind to the steady and vigorous discharge of the part you are called to act. This leads me,

II. To point out the particular duties which open to those who are in the middle period of life. They are now come forward to that field of action where they are to mix in all the stir and bustle of the world; where all the human powers are brought forth into full exercise; where all that is conceived to be important in human affairs is incessantly going on around them. The time of youth was the preparation for future action. In old age our active part is supposed to be finished, and rest is permitted. Middle age is the season when we are expected to display the fruits which education had prepared and ripened. In this world, all of us were formed to be assistants to one another. The

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The wants of society call for every man's labour, and require various departments to be filled up. They require that some be appointed to rule, and others to obey; some to defend the society from danger, others to maintain its internal order and peace; some to provide the conveniences of life, others to promote the improvement of the mind; many to work; others to contrive and direct. In short, within the sphere of society there is employment for every one; and, in the course of these employments, many a moral duty is to be performed; many a religious grace to be exercised. No one is permitted to be a mere blank in the world. No rank, nor station, no dignity of birth, nor extent of possessions, exempt any man from contributing his share to public utility and good. This is the precept of God. This is the voice of nature. This is the just demand of the human race upon one another.

One of the first questions, therefore, which every man who is in the vigour of his age should put to himself is, "What "am I doing in this world? What have

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" I yet done, whereby I may glorify God, " and be useful to my fellows? Do I pro- " perly fill up the place which belongs to " my rank and station? Will any memo- " rial remain of my having existed on the " earth? or are my days passing fruitless " away, now when I might be of some " importance in the system of human af- " fairs?"——Let not any man imagine that he is of no importance, and has, upon that account, a privilege to trifle with his days at pleasure. *Talents* have been given to all; to some *ten;* to others, *five;* to others, *two.* *Occupy with these till I come*, is the command of the great Master to all. Where superiour abilities are possessed, or distinguished advantages of fortune are enjoyed, a wider range is afforded for useful exertion, and the world is entitled to expect it. But among those who fill up the inferiour departments of society, though the sphere of usefulness be more contracted, no one is left entirely insignificant. Let us remember, that in all stations and conditions, the important relations take place, of masters and servants,

Luke, xix. 31.

vants, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and friends, citizens and subjects. The discharge of the duties arising from those various relations, forms a great portion of the work assigned to the middle age of man. Though the part we have to act may be confined within a humble line, yet if it be honourably acted, it will be always found to carry its own reward.

In fine, industry, in all its virtuous forms, ought to inspirit and invigorate manhood. This will add to it both satisfaction and dignity; will make the current of our years, as they roll, flow along in a clear and equable stream, without the putrid stagnation of sloth and idleness. Idleness is the great corrupter of youth; and the bane and dishonour of middle age. He who, in the prime of life, finds time to hang heavy on his hands, may with much reason suspect, that he has not consulted the duties which the consideration of his age imposed upon him; assuredly he has not consulted his own happiness.

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happiness. But, amidst all the bustle of the world, let us not forget,

III. To guard with vigilance against the peculiar dangers which attend the period of middle life. It is much to be regretted, that in the present state of things there is no period of man's age in which his virtue is not exposed to perils. Pleasure lays its snares for youth; and, after the season of youthful follies is past, other temptations, no less formidable to virtue, presently arise. The love of pleasure is succeeded by the passion for interest. In this passion the whole mind is too often absorbed; and the change thereby induced on the character, is of no amiable kind. Amidst the excesses of youth, virtuous affections often remain. The attachments of friendship, the love of honour, and the warmth of sensibility, give a degree of lustre to the character, and cover many a failing. But interest, when it is become the ruling principle, both debases the mind and hardens the heart. It deadens the feeling of every thing

thing that is sublime or refined. It contracts the affections within a narrow circle; and extinguishes all those sparks of generosity and tenderness which once glowed in the breast.

In proportion as worldly pursuits multiply, and competitions rise, ambition, jealousy, and envy, combine with interest to excite bad passions, and to increase the corruption of the heart. At first, perhaps, it was a man's intention to advance himself in the world by none but fair and laudable methods. He retained for some time an aversion to whatever appeared dishonourable. But here, he is encountered by the violence of an enemy. There, he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The pride of a superiour insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him. Animosities ruffle his temper. Suspicions poison his mind. He finds, or imagines that he finds, the artful and designing surrounding him on every hand. He views corruption and iniquity prevailing; the modest neglected; the forward and the crafty rising to distinction. Too easily, from the example

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example of others, he learns that mystery of vice, called the way of the world. What he has learned, he fancies necessary to practise for his own defence; and of course assumes that supple and versatile character, which he observes to be frequent, and which often has appeared to him successful.

To these, and many more dangers of the same kind, is the man exposed who is deeply engaged in active life. No small degree of firmness in religious principle, and of constancy in virtue, is requisite, in order to prevent his being assimilated to the spirit of the world, and carried away by the *multitude of evil doers.* Let him therefore call to mind those principles which ought to fortify him against such temptations to vice. Let him often recollect that, whatever his station in life may be, he is a man; he is a Christian. These are the chief characters which he has to support; characters superiour far, if they be supported with dignity, to any of the titles with which courts can decorate him; superiour to all that can be acquired

acquired in the strife of a busy world. Let him think, that though it may be desirable to increase his opulence, or to advance his rank, yet what he ought to hold much more sacred is, to maintain his integrity and honour. If these be forfeited, wealth or station will have few charms left. They will not be able to protect him long from sinking into contempt in the eye of an observing world. Even to his own eye he will at last appear base and wretched.——Let not the affairs of the world entirely ingross his time and thoughts. From that contagious air which he breathes in the midst of it, let him sometimes retreat into the salutary shade consecrated to devotion and to wisdom. There, conversing seriously with his own soul, and looking up to the Father of spirits, let him study to calm those unquiet passions, and to rectify those internal disorders, which intercourse with the world had excited and increased. In order to render this medicine of the mind more effectual, it will be highly proper,

IV. That,

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IV. That, as we advance in the course of years, we often attend to the lapse of time and life, and to the revolutions which these are ever effecting. In this meditation, one of the first reflections which should occur is, how much we owe to that God who hath hitherto helped us; who hath brought us on so far in life; hath guided us through the slippery paths of youth, and now enables us to flourish in the strength of manhood. Look back, my friends, to those who started along with yourselves in the race of life. Think how many of them have fallen around you. Observe how many blank spaces you can number in the catalogue of those who were once your companions. If, in the midst of so much devastation, you have been preserved and blessed; consider seriously what returns you owe to the goodness of Heaven. Inquire whether your conduct has corresponded to these obligations; whether, in public and in private, you have honoured, as became you, the God of your fathers; and whether, amidst the unknown occurrences that are yet before

fore you, you have ground to hope for the continued protection of the Almighty.

Bring to mind the various revolutions which you have beheld in human affairs, since you became actors on this busy theatre. Reflect on the changes which have taken place in men and manners, in opinions and customs, in private fortunes, and in public conduct. By the observations you have made on these, and the experience you have gained, have you improved proportionably in wisdom? Have the changes of the world which you have witnessed, loosened all unreasonable attachment to it? Have they taught you this great lesson, that, while *the fashion of the world is* ever *passing away*, only in God and in virtue stability is to be found? Of great use, amidst the whirl of the world, are such pauses as these in life; such resting-places of thought and reflection; whence we can calmly and deliberately look back on the past, and anticipate the future.

To

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To the future, we are often casting an eager eye, and fondly storing it, in our imagination, with many a pleasing scene. But if we would look to it, like wise men, let it be under the persuasion that it is nearly to resemble the past, in bringing forward a mixture of alternate hopes and fears, of griefs and joys. In order to be prepared for whatever it may bring, let us cultivate that manly fortitude of mind, which, supported by a pious trust in God, will enable us to encounter properly the vicissitudes of our state. No quality is more necessary than this, to them who are passing through that stormy season of life of which we now treat. Softness and effeminacy let them leave to the young and unexperienced, who are amusing themselves with florid prospects of bliss. But to those who are now engaged in the middle of their course, who are supposed to be well acquainted with the world, and to know that they have to struggle in it with various hardships; firmness, vigour, and resolution, are dispositions more suitable.

able. They must buckle on well this armour of the mind, if they would issue forth into the contest with any prospect of success.—While we thus study to correct the errours, and to provide against the dangers, which are peculiar to this stage of life, let us also,

V. Lay foundation for comfort in old age. That is a period which all expect and hope to see; and to which, amidst the toils of the world, men sometimes look forward, not without satisfaction, as to the period of retreat and rest. But let them not deceive themselves. A joyless and dreary season it will prove, if they arrive at it with an unimproved, or corrupted mind. For old age, as for every other thing, a certain preparation is requisite; and that preparation consists chiefly in three particulars; in the acquisition of knowledge, of friends, of virtue. There is an acquisition of another kind, of which it is altogether needless for me to give any recommendation, that of riches. But though this, by many, will be es-

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teemed a more material acquisition than all the three I have named, it may be confidently pronounced, that without these other requisites, all the wealth we can lay up in store will prove insufficient for making our latter days pass smoothly away.

First, He who wishes to render his old age comfortable, should study betimes to enlarge and improve his mind; and by thought and inquiry, by reading and reflecting, to acquire a taste for useful knowledge. This will provide for him a great and noble entertainment, when other entertainments leave him. If he bring into the solitary retreat of age, a vacant, uninformed mind, where no knowledge dawns, where no ideas rise, which has nothing to feed upon within itself, many a heavy and comfortless day he must necessarily pass.—Next, When a man declines into the vale of years, he depends more on the aid of his friends, than in any other period of his life. Then is the time, when he would especially wish to find himself surrounded by some who

who love and respect him; who will bear with his infirmities, relieve him of his labours, and cheer him with their society. Let him, therefore, now in the summer of his days, while yet active and flourishing, by acts of seasonable kindness and beneficence, ensure that love, and by upright and honourable conduct lay foundation for that respect, which in old age he would wish to enjoy.—In the last place, Let him consider a good conscience, peace with God, and the hope of heaven, as the most effectual consolations he can possess, when the *evil days shall come*, wherein, otherwise, he is likely to find little pleasure. It is not merely by transient acts of devotion that such consolations are to be provided. The regular tenour of a virtuous and pious life, spent in the faithful discharge of all the duties of our station, will prove the best preparation for old age, for death, and for immortality.

Among the measures thus taken for the latter scenes of life, let me admonish every one not to forget to put his worldly

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affairs in order in due time. This is a duty which he owes to his character, to his family, or to those, whoever they be, that are to succeed him; but a duty too often unwisely delayed, from a childish aversion to entertain any thoughts of quitting the world. Let him not trust much to what he will do in his old age. Sufficient for that day, if he shall live to see it, will be the burden thereof. It has been remarked, that as men advance in years, they care less to think of death. Perhaps it occurs oftener to the thoughts of the young, than of the old. Feebleness of spirit renders melancholy ideas more oppressive; and after having been so long accustomed and inured to the world, men bear worse with any thing which reminds them that they must soon part with it.—However, as to part with it is the doom of all, let us take measures betimes for going off the stage, when it shall be our turn to withdraw, with decency and propriety; leaving nothing unfulfilled which it is expedient to have done before we die. To live long, ought not to be our favourite

vourite wish, so much as to live well. By continuing too long on earth, we might only live to witness a great number of melancholy scenes, and to expose ourselves to a wider compass of human woe. He who has served his generation faithfully in the world, has duly honoured God, and been beneficent and useful to mankind; he who in his life has been respected and beloved; whose death is accompanied with the sincere regret of all who knew him, and whose memory is honoured; that man has sufficiently fulfilled his course, whether it was appointed by Providence to be long or short. For *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years; but wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.* Wisdom, iv. 8, 9.

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On Death.

Ecclesiastes, xii. 5.

——*Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*

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THIS is a sight which incessantly presents itself. Our eyes are so much accustomed to it, that it hardly makes any impression. Throughout every season of the year, and during the course of almost every day, the funerals which pass along the streets, show us *man going to his long home.* Were death a rare and uncommon object; were it only once in the course of a man's life, that he beheld one of his fellow-creatures carried to the grave, a solemn awe would fill him; he would stop short in the midst of his pleasures; he would

would even be chilled with secret horrour. Such impressions, however, would prove unsuitable to the nature of our present state. When they became so strong as to render men unfit for the ordinary business of life, they would in a great measure defeat the intention of our being placed in this world. It is better ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that they should be weakened by the frequency of their recurrence; and so tempered by the mixture of other passions, as to allow us to go on freely in acting our parts on earth.

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Yet, familiar as death is now become, it is undoubtedly fit, that by an event of so important a nature, some impression should be made upon our minds. It ought not to pass over, as one of those common incidents which are beheld without concern, and awaken no reflection. There are many things which the funerals of our fellow-creatures are calculated to teach; and happy it were for the gay and dissipated, if they would listen more fre-

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quently to the instructions of so awful a monitor. In the context, the wise man had described, under a variety of images suited to the eastern style, the growing infirmities of old age, until they arrive at that period which concludes them all; when, as he beautifully expresses it, *the silver cord being loosened, and the golden bowl broken, the pitcher being broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.* In discoursing from these words, it is not my purpose to treat, at present, of the instructions to be drawn from the prospect of our own death. I am to confine myself to the death of others; to consider death as one of the most frequent and considerable events that happen in the course of human affairs; and to show in what manner we ought to be affected, first, by the death of strangers, or indifferent persons; secondly, by the death of friends; and thirdly, by the death of enemies.

I. By

I. By the death of indifferent persons; if any can be called indifferent to whom we are so nearly allied as brethren by nature, and brethren in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk along the monuments of death, the first thing that naturally strikes us, is the undistinguishing blow, with which that common enemy levels all. We behold a great promiscuous multitude all carried to the same abode; all lodged in the same dark and silent mansions. There, mingle persons of every age and character, of every rank and condition in life; the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the gay and the grave, the renowned and the ignoble. A few weeks ago, most of those whom we have seen carried to the grave, walked about as we do now on the earth; enjoyed their friends, beheld the light of the sun, and were forming designs for future days. Perhaps, it is not long since they were engaged in scenes of high festivity. For them, perhaps, the cheerful company assembled; and in the midst of the circle they shone with

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with gay and pleasing vivacity. But now—to them, all is finally closed. To them, no more shall the seasons return, or the sun rise. No more shall they hear the voice of mirth, or behold the face of man. They are swept from the universe, as though they had never been. They are *carried away as with a flood; the wind has passed over them, and they are gone.*

When we contemplate this desolation of the human race; this final termination of so many hopes; this silence that now reigns among those who, a little while ago, were so busy or so gay; who can avoid being touched with sensations at once awful and tender? What heart but then warms with the glow of humanity? In whose eye does not the tear gather, on revolving the fate of passing and short-lived man? Such sensations are so congenial to human nature, that they are attended with a certain kind of sorrowful pleasure. Even voluptuaries themselves sometimes indulge a taste for funeral melancholy. After the festive assembly is dismissed, they choose to walk retired in the

the shady grove, and to contemplate the venerable sepulchres of their ancestors. This melancholy pleasure arises from two different sentiments meeting at the same time in the breast; a sympathetic sense of the shortness and vanity of life, and a persuasion that something exists after death; sentiments which unite at the view of *the house appointed for all living*. A tomb, it has been justly said, is a monument situated on the confines of both worlds. It, at once, presents to us the termination of the inquietudes of life, and sets before us the image of eternal rest. *There*, in the elegant expressions of Job, *the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.* It is very remarkable, that, in all languages, and among all nations, death has been described in a style of this kind; expressed by figures of speech, which convey everywhere the same idea of rest, or sleep, or retreat from the evils of life. Such a style perfectly

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perfectly agrees with the general belief of the soul's immortality; but assuredly conveys no high idea of the boasted pleasures of the world. It shows how much all mankind have felt this life to be a scene of trouble and care; and have agreed in opinion, that perfect rest is to be expected only in the grave.

There, says Job, *are the small and the great.* There, the poor man lays down at last the burden of his wearisome life. No more shall he groan under the load of poverty and toil. No more shall he hear the insolent calls of the master, from whom he received his scanty wages. No more shall he be raised from needful slumber on his bed of straw, nor be hurried away from his homely meal, to undergo the repeated labours of the day. While his humble grave is preparing, and a few poor and decayed neighbours are carrying him thither, it is good for us to think that this man too was our brother; that for him the aged and destitute wife, and the needy children, now weep; that, neglected as he was by the world, he possessed perhaps

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perhaps both a sound understanding and a worthy heart; and is now carried by angels to rest in Abraham's bosom.—At no great distance from him, the grave is opened to receive the rich and proud man. For, as it is said with emphasis in the parable, *the rich man also died, and was buried.* He *also* died. His riches prevented not his sharing the same fate with the poor man; perhaps, through luxury, they accelerated his doom. Then, indeed, *the mourners go about the street;* and while, in all the pomp and magnificence of woe, his funeral is prepared, his heirs, in the mean time, impatient to examine his will, are looking on one another with jealous eyes, and already beginning to quarrel about the division of his substance.——One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped as it began to blossom in the parents' view; and the next day, we behold a young man, or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous, unconcerned company,

Luke, xvi. 22.

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company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, let our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and represent to themselves what is going on there. There, we should see a disconsolate family, sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society; and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every memorial that presents itself of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

Another day, we follow to the grave one who, in old age, and after a long career of life, has, in full maturity, sunk at last into rest. As we are going along to the mansion of the dead, it is natural for us to think, and to discourse, of all the changes which such a person has seen during the course of his life. He has passed, it is likely, through varieties of fortune. He has experienced prosperity and

and adversity. He has seen families and kindreds rise and fall. He has seen peace and war succeeding in their turns; the face of his country undergoing many alterations; and the very city in which he dwelt, rising, in a manner, new around him. After all he has beheld, his eyes are now closed for ever. He was becoming a stranger in the midst of a new succession of men. A race who knew him not, had arisen to fill the earth. Thus passes the world away. Throughout all ranks and conditions, *one generation passeth, and another generation cometh;* and this great inn is by turns evacuated, and replenished by troops of succeeding pilgrims.——O vain and inconstant world! O fleeting and transient life! When will the sons of men learn to think of thee as they ought? When will they learn humanity, from the afflictions of their brethren; or moderation and wisdom, from the sense of their own fugitive state?——But now to come nearer to ourselves, let us,

II. Consider

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II. CONSIDER the death of our friends. Want of reflection, or the long habits either of a very busy, or a very dissipated life, may have rendered men insensible to all such objects as I have now described. The stranger, and the unknown, fall utterly unnoticed at their side. Life proceeds with them in its usual train, without being affected by events in which they take no personal concern. But the dissolution of those ties, which had long bound men together in intimate and familiar union, gives a painful shock to every heart. When a family, who, for years, had been living in comfort and peace, are suddenly shattered by some of their most beloved or respected members being torn from them; when the husband or the spouse are separated for ever from the companion, who, amidst every vicissitude of fortune, solaced their life; who had shared all their joys, and participated in all their sorrows; when the weeping parent is folding in his arms the dying child whom he tenderly loved; when he is giving his last blessing, receiving

ing the last fond adieu, looking for the last time on that countenance, now wasting and faded, which he had once beheld with much delight; then is the time, when the heart is made to drink all the bitterness of human woe.—But I seek not to wound your feelings by dwelling on these sad descriptions. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the manner in which such events ought to be received and improved, since happen they must in the life of man.

Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief, in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one to show, on such occasions, that he feels as a man ought to feel. At the same time, let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a Christian. He must not *sorrow like those who have no hope.* As high elation of spirits befits not the joys, so continued and overwhelming dejection suits not the grief of this transitory world. Grief, when it goes beyond

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certain bounds, becomes unmanly; when it lasts beyond a certain time, becomes unseasonable. Let him not reject the alleviation which time brings to all the wounds of the heart, but suffer excessive grief to subside, by degrees, into a tender and affectionate remembrance. Let him consider, that it is in the power of Providence to raise him up other comforts in the place of those he has lost. Or, if his mind, at present, reject the thoughts of such consolation, let it turn for relief to the prospect of a future meeting in a happier world. This is, indeed, the chief soother of affliction; the most powerful balm of the bleeding heart. It assists us to view death, as no more than a temporary separation from friends. They whom we have loved, still live, though not present to us. They are only removed into a different mansion in the house of the common Father. The toils of their pilgrimage are finished; and they are gone to the land of rest and peace. They are gone from this dark and troubled world, to join the great assembly of the just; and to

dwell

dwell in the midst of everlasting light. In due time, we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of re-union arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope. SERMON V.

Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues, and cherish the memory of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth, and trace their steps. By this means, the remembrance of those whom we loved, shall become useful and improving to us, as well as sacred and dear; if we accustom ourselves to consider them as still speaking, and exhorting us to all that is good; if, in situations where our virtue is tried, we call up their respected idea to view, and, as placed in their presence, think of the part which we could act before them without a blush.

Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost, strengthen our affection to those that remain. The nar-

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rower the circle becomes of those we love, let us draw the closer together. Let the heart that has been softened by sorrow, mellow into gentleness and kindness; make liberal allowance for the weaknesses of others; and divest itself of the little prejudices that may have formerly prepossessed it against them. The greater havoc that death has made among our friends on earth, let us cultivate connection more with God, and heaven, and virtue. Let those noble views which man's immortal character affords, fill and exalt our minds. Passengers only through this sublunary region, let our thoughts often ascend to that divine country, which we are taught to consider as the native seat of the soul. There we form connexions that are never broken. There we meet with friends who never die. Among celestial things there is firm and lasting constancy, while all that is on earth changes and passes away.—— Such are some of the fruits we should reap from the tender feelings excited by the death of friends. But they are not only our friends who die. Our enemies also must

must go to their *long home*. Let us, therefore, SERMON V.

III. CONSIDER how we ought to be affected, when they from whom suspicions have alienated, or rivalry has divided us; they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, are laid, or about to be laid, in the grave. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we had been long involved, those contests and feuds which we thought were to last for ever? The awful moment that now terminates them, makes us feel their vanity. If there be a spark of humanity left in the breast, the remembrance of our common fate then awakens it. Is there a man who, if he were admitted to stand by the death-bed of his bitterest enemy, and beheld him enduring that conflict which human nature must suffer at the last, would not be inclined to stretch forth the hand of friendship, to utter the voice of forgiveness, and to wish for perfect reconci-

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liation with him before he left the world? Who is there that when he beholds the remains of his adversary deposited in the dust, feels not, in that moment, some relentings at the remembrance of those past animosities which mutually embittered their life?—"There "lies the man with whom I contended "so long, silent and mute for ever. He "is fallen, and I am about to follow "him. How poor is the advantage "which I now enjoy? Where are the "fruits of all our contests? In a short "time we shall be laid together; and "no remembrance remain of either of "us under the sun. How many mis-"takes may there have been between "us? Had not he his virtues and good "qualities as well as I? When we both "shall appear before the judgment-seat "of God, shall I be found innocent "and free of blame, for all the en-"mity I have borne to him?"——My friends, let the anticipation of such sentiments serve now to correct the inveteracy of prejudice, to cool the heat of anger,

anger, to allay the fierceness of resentment. How unnatural is it for animosities so lasting to possess the hearts of mortal men, that nothing can extinguish them but the cold hand of death? Is there not a sufficient proportion of evils in the short span of human life, that we seek to increase their number, by rushing into unnecessary contests with one another? When a few suns more have rolled over our heads, friends and foes shall have retreated together; and their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are all journeying onwards to death, let us rather *bear one another's burdens*, than harass one another by the way. Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can, rather than fill the valley of our pilgrimage with the hateful monuments of our contention and strife.

THUS I have set before you some of those meditations which are naturally suggested by the prevalence of death around

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us; by the death of strangers, of friends, and of enemies. Because topics of this nature are obvious, let it not be thought that they are without use. They require to be recalled, repeated, and enforced. Moral and religious instruction derives its efficacy, not so much from what men are taught to know, as from what they are brought to feel. It is not the dormant knowledge of any truths, but the vivid impression of them, which has influence on practice. Neither let it be thought that such meditations are unseasonable intrusions upon those who are living in health, in affluence, and ease. There is no hazard of their making too deep or painful an impression. The gloom which they occasion is transient; and will soon, too soon, it is probable, be dispelled by the succeeding affairs and pleasures of the world. To wisdom it certainly belongs, that men should be impressed with just views of their nature and their state; and the pleasures of life will always be enjoyed to most advantage when they are tempered

tempered with serious thought. There is *a time to mourn*, as well as *a time to rejoice*. There is a virtuous *sorrow, which is better than laughter*. There is a *sadness of the countenance, by which the heart is made better*.

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On the Progress of Vice.

1 Corinthians, xv. 33.

Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners.

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THOUGH human nature be now fallen from its original honour, several good principles still remain in the hearts of men. There are few, if any, on whose minds the reverence for a Supreme Being continues not, in some degree, impressed. In every breast, some benevolent affections are found, and conscience still retains a sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. These principles of virtue are always susceptible of improvement; and, in favourable situations, might have a happy influence on practice.

tice. But such is the frailty of our nature, and so numerous are the temptations to evil, that they are in perpetual hazard of being either totally effaced, or so far weakened as to produce no effect on conduct. They are good seeds originally sown in the heart; but which require culture, in order to make them rise to any maturity. If left without assistance, they are likely to be stifled by that profusion of noxious weeds which the soil sends forth around them.

Among the numerous causes which introduce corruption into the heart, and accelerate its growth, none is more unhappily powerful than that which is pointed out in the Text, under the description of *evil communications;* that is, the contagion which is diffused by bad examples, and heightened by particular connexions with persons of loose principles, or dissolute morals. This, in a licentious state of society, is the most common source of those vices and disorders which so much abound in great cities; and often proves, in a particular manner, fatal to the young; even

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even to them whose beginnings were once auspicious and promising. It may therefore be an useful employment of attention, to trace the progress of this principle of corruption; to examine the means by which *evil communications* gradually undermine, and at last destroy, *good manners*, or (which here is the proper signification of the original word) *good morals*. It is indeed disagreeable to contemplate human nature, in this downward course of its progress. But it is always profitable to know our own infirmities and dangers. The consideration of them will lead me to suggest some of the means proper to be used, for preventing the mischiefs arising from *evil communications*.

AGREEABLY to what I observed of certain virtuous principles being inherent in human nature, there are few but who set out at first in the world with good dispositions. The warmth which belongs to youth naturally exerts itself in generous feelings, and sentiments of honour; in strong attachments to friends, and the other

other emotions of a kind and tender heart Almost all the plans with which persons who have been liberally educated begin the world, are connected with honourable views. At that period they repudiate whatever is mean or base. It is pleasing to them to think of commanding the esteem of those among whom they live, and of acquiring a name among men. But alas! how soon does this flattering prospect begin to be overcast! Desires of pleasure usher in temptation, and forward the growth of disorderly passions. Ministers of vice are seldom wanting to encourage, and flatter the passions of the young. Inferiours study to creep into favour, by servile obsequiousness to all their desires and humours. Glad to find any apology for the indulgences of which they are fond, the young too readily listen to the voice of those who suggest to them, that strict notions of religion, order, and virtue, are old-fashioned and illiberal; that the restraints which they impose are only fit to be prescribed to those who are in the first stage of pupilage; or to be

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be preached to the vulgar, who ought to be kept within the closest bounds of regularity and subjection. But the goodness of their hearts, it is insinuated to them, and the liberality of their views, will fully justify their emancipating themselves, in some degree, from the rigid discipline of parents and teachers.

Soothing as such insinuations are to the youthful and inconsiderate, their first steps, however, in vice, are cautious and timid, and occasionally checked by remorse. As they begin to mingle more in the world, and emerge into the circles of gaiety and pleasure, finding these loose ideas countenanced by too general practice, they gradually become bolder in the liberties they take. If they had been bred to business, they begin to tire of industry, and look with contempt on the plodding race of citizens. If they be of superiour rank, they think it becomes them to resemble their equals; to assume that freedom of behaviour, that air of forwardness, that tone of dissipation, that easy negligence of those with whom they converse,

converse, which appear fashionable in high life. If affluence of fortune unhappily concur to favour their inclinations, amusements and diversions succeed in a perpetual round; night and day are confounded; gaming fills up their vacant intervals; they live wholly in public places; they run into many degrees of excess, disagreeable even to themselves, merely from weak complaisance, and the fear of being ridiculed by their loose associates. Among these associates, the most hardened and determined always take the lead. The rest follow them with implicit submission; and make proficiency in the school of iniquity, in exact proportion to the weakness of their understandings, and the strength of their passions.

How many pass away, after this manner, some of the most valuable years of their life, tost in a whirlpool of what cannot be called pleasure, so much as mere giddiness and folly? In the habits of perpetual connexion with idle or licentious company, all reflection is lost; while circulated from one empty head, and one thoughtless

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thoughtless heart, to another, folly shoots up into all its most ridiculous forms; prompts the extravagant unmeaning frolic in private; or sallies forth in public into mad riot; impelled sometimes by intoxication, sometimes by mere levity of spirits.

All the while, amidst this whole course of juvenile infatuation, I readily admit, that much good-nature may still remain. Generosity and attachments may be found; nay, some awe of religion may still subsist, and some remains of those good impressions which were made upon the mind in early days. It might yet be very possible to reclaim such persons, and to form them for useful and respectable stations in the world, if virtuous and improving society should happily succeed to the place of that idle crew with whom they now associate; if important business should occur, to bring them into a different sphere of action; or if some reasonable stroke of affliction should in mercy be sent, to recal them to themselves, and to awaken serious and manly thought.

thought. But, if youth, and vigour, and flowing fortune, continue; if a similar succession of companions go on to amuse them, to ingross their time, and to stir up their passions; the day of ruin,—let them take heed and beware!—the day of irrecoverable ruin begins to draw nigh. Fortune is squandered; health is broken; friends are offended, affronted, estranged; aged parents, perhaps, sent afflicted and mourning to the dust.

There are certain degrees of vice which are chiefly stamped with the character of the ridiculous, and the contemptible; and there are also certain limits, beyond which if it pass, it becomes odious and execrable. If, to other corruptions which the heart has already received, be added the infusion of sceptical principles, that worst of all the *evil communications* of sinners, the whole of morals is then on the point of being overthrown. For, every crime can then be palliated to conscience; every check and restraint which had hitherto remained, is taken away. He who, in the beginning of his course,

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soothed himself with the thought, that while he indulged his desires, he did hurt to no man; now pressed by the necessity of supplying those wants into which his expensive pleasures have brought him, goes on without remorse to defraud and to oppress. The lover of pleasure now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his trust, or betrays his friend; becomes a man of treachery, or a man of blood; satisfying, or at least endeavouring all the while to satisfy himself, that circumstances form his excuse; that by necessity he is impelled; and that, in gratifying the passions which nature had implanted within him, he does no more than follow nature.

Miserable and deluded man! to what art thou come at the last? Dost thou pretend to follow nature, when thou art contemning the laws of the God of nature? when thou art stifling his voice within thee, which remonstrates against thy crimes? when thou art violating the best part of thy nature, by counteracting the dictates of justice and humanity? Dost

Dost thou follow nature, when thou renderest thyself an useless animal on the earth; and not useless only, but noxious to the society to which thou belongest, and to which thou art a disgrace; noxious, by the bad example thou hast set; noxious, by the crimes thou hast committed; sacrificing innocence to thy guilty pleasures, and introducing shame and ruin into the habitations of peace; defrauding of their due the unsuspicious who have trusted thee; involving in the ruins of thy fortune many a worthy family; reducing the industrious and the aged to misery and want; by all which, if thou hast escaped the deserved sword of justice, thou hast at least brought on thyself the resentment, and the reproach, of all the respectable and the worthy?—Tremble then at the view of the gulph which is opening before thee. Look with horror at the precipice, on the brink of which thou standest; and if yet a moment be left for retreat, think how thou mayest escape, and be saved.

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THIS brings me to what I proposed as the next head of discourse; to suggest some means that may be used for stopping in time the progress of such mischiefs; to point out some remedies against the fatal infection of *evil communications.*

THE first and most obvious is, to withdraw from all associations with bad men, with persons either of licentious principles, or of disorderly conduct. I have shown to what issue such dangerous connections are apt to bring men at last. Nothing, therefore, is of more importance for the young, to whom I now chiefly address myself, than to be careful in the choice of their friends and companions. This choice is too frequently made without much thought, or is determined by some casual connection; and yet, very often, the whole fate of their future life depends upon it. The circumstances which chiefly attract the liking and the friendship of youth, are, vivacity, good humour, engaging manners, and a cheerful or easy temper; qualities, I confess, amiable in themselves, and useful

ful and valuable in their place. But I intreat you to remember, that these are not all the qualities requisite to form an intimate companion or friend. Something more is still to be looked for; a sound understanding, a steady mind, a firm attachment to principle, to virtue, and honour. As only solid bodies polish well, it is only on the substantial ground of these manly endowments, that the other amiable qualities can receive their proper lustre. Destitute of these essential requisites, they shine with no more than a tinsel brilliancy. It may sparkle for a little, amidst a few circles of the frivolous and superficial; but it imposes not on the discernment of the public. The world in general seldom, after a short trial, judges amiss of the characters of men. You may be assured, that its character of you will be formed by the company you frequent; and, how agreeable soever they may seem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but hollow qualities, and external accomplishments, they soon fall down into the class, at best, of the insignificant, perhaps of the

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worthless; and you sink, of course, in the opinion of the public, into the same despicable rank.

Allow me to warn you, that the most gay and pleasing, are sometimes the most insidious and dangerous companions; an admonition which respects both the sexes. Often they attach themselves to you from interested motives; and if any taint or suspicion lie on their character, under the cover of your rank, your fortune, or your good reputation, they seek protection for themselves. Look round you, then, with attentive eye, and weigh characters well, before you connect yourselves too closely with any who court your society. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Wherefore, *enter not thou into the council of the scorner. Walk not in the way with evil men; avoid it; pass not by it: turn from it, and pass away.*

Proverbs, xiii. 20.

iv. 14.

In order to prevent the influence of *evil communications*, it is farther needful, that you fix to yourselves certain principles of conduct,

conduct, and to be resolved and determined on no occasion to swerve from them. Setting the consideration of religion and virtue aside, and attending merely to interest and reputation, it will be found, that he who enters on active life without having ascertained some regular plan, according to which he is to guide himself, will be unprosperous in the whole of his subsequent progress. But when conduct is viewed in a moral and religious light, the effect of having fixed no principles of action, of having formed no laudable standard of character, becomes more obviously fatal. For hence it is, that the young and thoughtless imbibe so readily the poison of *evil communications*, and fall a prey to every seducer. They have no internal guide whom they are accustomed to follow and obey; nothing within themselves that can give firmness to their conduct. They are of course the victims of momentary inclination or caprice; religious and good by starts, when, during the absence of temptation and tempters, the virtuous principle stirs within them; but

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never long the same; changing and fluctuating according to the passion that chances to rise, or the instigation of those with whom they have connected themselves. They are sailing on a dangerous sea, which abounds with rocks; without compass, by which to direct their course; or helm, by which to guide the vessel. Whereas, if they acted on a system, if their behaviour made it appear that they were determined to conduct themselves by certain rules and principles, not only would they escape innumerable dangers, but they would command respect from the licentious themselves. Evil doers would cease to lay their snares for one whom they saw moving above them, in a higher sphere, and with a more steady course.

As a farther corrective of *evil communications*, and as a foundation to those principles which you lay down for conduct, let me advise you sometimes to think, seriously, of what constitutes real enjoyment and happiness. Your days cannot be entirely spent in company and pleasure. How

How closely soever you are surrounded and besieged by evil companions, there must be some intervals, in which you are left by yourselves; when, after all the turbulence of amusement is over, your mind will naturally assume a graver and more pensive cast. These are precious intervals to you, if you knew their value. Seize that sober hour of retirement and silence. Indulge the meditations which then begin to rise. Cast your eye backwards on what is past of your life; look forward to what is probably to come. Think of the part you are now acting; and of what remains to be acted, perhaps to be suffered, before you die. Then is the time to form your plans of happiness, not merely for the next day, but for the general course of your life. Remember, that what is pleasing to you at twenty, will not be equally so at forty or fifty years of age; and that what continues longest pleasing, is always most valuable. Recollect your own feelings in different scenes of life. Inquire on what occasions you have felt the truest satisfaction; whether days of sobriety and a rational

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a rational employment have not left behind them a more agreeable remembrance, than nights of licentiousness and riot. Look round you on the world; reflect on the different societies which have fallen under your observation; and think who among them appear to enjoy life to most advantage; whether they who, encircled by gay companions, are constantly fatiguing themselves in quest of pleasure; or they to whom pleasure comes unsought, in the course of an active, virtuous, and manly life. Compare together these two classes of mankind, and ask your own hearts, to which of them you would choose to belong. If, in a happy moment, the light of truth begin to break in upon you, refuse not admittance to the ray. If your hearts secretly reproach you for the wrong choice you have made, bethink yourselves that the evil is not irreparable. Still there is time for repentance and retreat; and a return to wisdom is always honourable.

Were such meditations often indu ged, the *evil communications* of sinners would die away before them; the force of their poison

poison would evaporate; the world would begin to assume in your eyes a new form and shape. Disdain not, in these solitary hours, to recollect what the wisest have said, and have written, concerning human happiness, and human vanity. Treat not their opinions, as effusions merely of peevishness or disappointment; but believe them to be, what they truly are, the result of long experience, and thorough acquaintance with the world. Consider that the season of youth is passing fast away. It is time for you to be taking measures for an establishment in life; nay, it were wise to be looking forward to a placid enjoyment of old age. That is a period you wish to see; but how miserable, when it arrives, if it yield you nothing but the dregs of life; and present no retrospect, except that of a thoughtless and dishonoured youth.

Let me once more advise you, to look forward sometimes beyond old age; to look to a future world. Amidst *evil communications*, let your belief, and your character

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racter as Christians arise to your view. Think of the sacred name in which you were baptised. Think of the God whom your fathers honoured and worshipped; of the religion in which they trained you up; of the venerable rites in which they brought you to partake. Their paternal cares have now ceased. They have finished their earthly course; and the time is coming when you must follow them. You know that you are not to live always here; and you surely do not believe that your existence is to end with this life. Into what world, then, are you next to go? Whom will you meet with there? Before whose tribunal are you to appear? What account will you be able to give of your present trifling and irregular conduct to Him who made you?—Such thoughts may be treated as unseasonable intrusions. But intrude they sometimes will, whether you make them welcome or not. Better, then, to allow them free reception when they come, and to consider fairly to what they lead. You have seen persons die; at least, you have heard of your friends dying near

near you. Did it never enter into your minds, to think what their last reflections probably were in their concluding moments; or what your own, in such a situation, would be? What would be then your hopes and fears; what part you would then wish to have acted; in what light your closing eyes would then view this life, and this world.

These are thoughts, my friends, too important to be always excluded. These are things too solemn and awful to be trifled with. They are superior to all the ridicule of fools. They come home to every man's bosom; and are entitled to every man's highest attention. Let us regard them as becomes reasonable and mortal creatures; and they will prove effectual antidotes to the *evil communications* of petulant scoffers. When vice or folly arise to tempt us under flattering forms, let the serious character which we bear as men come also forward to view; and let the solemn admonitions, with which I conclude, sound full in our ears: *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Come out*

Prov. i. 10.

2 Cor. vi. 17.

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out from amongst them, and be separate.
Remember thy Creator in the days of thy
Eccl. xii. 1. *youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from*
Prov. xv. 24. *evil. The way of life is above to the wise;*
and he that keepeth the commandment, keep-
eth his own soul.

SERMON VII.

On Fortitude.

PSALM xxvii. 3.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.

THIS world is a region of danger, in which perfect safety is possessed by no man. Though we live in times of established tranquillity, when there is no ground to apprehend that *an host* shall, in the literal sense, *encamp against us;* yet every man, from one quarter or other, has somewhat to dread. *Riches* often *make to themselves wings, and flee away.* The firmest health may in a moment be shaken. The most flourishing family may unexpectedly be scattered. The appearances of our security are frequently deceitful.

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When our sky seems more settled and serene, in some unobserved quarter gathers the little black cloud, in which the tempest ferments, and prepares to discharge itself on our head. Such is the real situation of man in this world; and he who flatters himself with an opposite view of his state, only lives in the paradise of fools.

In this situation, no quality is more requisite than constancy, or fortitude of mind; a quality which the Psalmist appears, from the sentiment in the text, to have possessed in an eminent degree. Fortitude was justly classed, by the ancient philosophers, among the cardinal virtues. It is indeed essential to the support of them all; and it is most necessary to be acquired by every one who wishes to discharge with fidelity the duties of his station. It is the armour of the mind, which will fit him for encountering the trials, and surmounting the dangers, that are likely to occur in the course of his life. It may be thought, perhaps, to be a quality, in some measure, constitutional; dependent

pendent on firmness of nerves, and strength of spirits. Though, partly, it is so, yet experience shows that it may also be acquired by principle, and be fortified by reason; and it is only when thus acquired, and thus fortified, that it can be accounted to carry the character of virtue. Fortitude is opposed, as all know, to timidity, irresolution, a feeble and a wavering spirit. It is placed, like other virtues, in the middle between two extremes; standing at an equal distance from rashness on the one hand, and from pusillanimity on the other. In discoursing on this subject, I propose, first, to show the importance of fortitude or constancy; next, to ascertain the grounds on which it must rest; and lastly, to suggest some considerations for assisting the exercise of it.

I. The high importance of fortitude will easily appear, if we consider it as respecting either the happiness of human life, or the proper discharge of its duties.

Without some degree of fortitude, there can be no happiness; because, amidst the

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thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquillity. The man of feeble and timorous spirit lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger, and trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the dangers that may arise. Often he creates imaginary ones; always magnifies those that are real. Hence, like a person haunted by spectres, he loses the free enjoyment even of a safe and prosperous state. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits.—On the other hand, firmness of mind is the parent of tranquillity. It enables one to enjoy the present without disturbance; and to look calmly on dangers that approach, or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes. It supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full possession of himself, in every situation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magna-

magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attacks of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

If fortitude be thus essential to the enjoyment of life, it is equally so to the proper discharge of all its most important duties. He who is of a cowardly mind is, and must be, a slave to the world. He fashions his whole conduct according to its hopes and fears. He smiles, and fawns, and betrays, from abject considerations of personal safety. He is incapable of either conceiving, or executing, any great design. He can neither stand the clamour of the multitude, nor the frowns of the mighty. The wind of popular favour, or the threats of power, are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose. The world always knows where to find him. He may pretend to have principles; but on every trying occasion, it will be seen, that his pre-

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tended principles bend to convenience and safety.—The man of virtuous fortitude, again, follows the dictates of his heart, unembarrassed by those restraints which lie upon the timorous. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say that this disposition alone will secure him against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least on one quarter he will be safe; by no abject fears misled into evil.

Without this temper of mind, no man can be a thorough Christian. For his profession, as such, requires him to be superior to that *fear of man which bringeth a snare;* enjoins him, for the sake of a good conscience, to encounter every danger; and to be prepared, if called, even to lay down his life in the cause of religion and truth. All who have been distinguished as servants of God, or benefactors of men;

men; all who, in perilous situations, have acted their part with such honour as to render their names illustrious through succeeding ages, have been eminent for fortitude of mind. Of this we have one conspicuous example in the apostle Paul, whom it will be instructive for us to view in a remarkable occurrence of his life. After having long acted as the Apostle of the Gentiles, his mission called him to go to Jerusalem, where he knew that he was to encounter the utmost violence of his enemies. Just before he set sail, he called together the elders of his favourite church at Ephesus, and in a pathetic speech, which does great honour to his character, gave them his last farewel. Deeply affected by their knowledge of the certain dangers to which he was exposing himself, all the assembly were filled with distress, and melted into tears. The circumstances were such as might have conveyed dejection even into a resolute mind; and would have totally overwhelmed the feeble. *They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing* Acts, xx. 37, 38.

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most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. What were then the sentiments, what was the language of this great and good man? Hear the words which spoke his firm and undaunted mind. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befal me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.* There was uttered the voice, there breathed the spirit, of a brave and a virtuous man. Such a man knows not what it is to shrink from danger, when conscience points out his path. In that path he is determined to walk; let the consequences be what they will. *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* "For me, there is a part ap-

Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24.

Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

"pointed

" pointed to act. I go to perform it. SERMON VII.
" My duty I shall do to-day. Let *to-*
" *morrow take thought for the things of it-*
" *self.*"——Having thus shown the importance, I proceed,

II. To show the proper foundations of constancy and fortitude of mind. They are principally two; a good conscience, and trust in God.

A corrupted and guilty man can possess no true firmness of heart. He who, by crooked paths, pursues dishonourable ends, has many things to dismay him. He not only dreads the disappointment of his designs, by some of those accidents to which all are exposed; but he has also to dread the treachery of his confederates, the discovery and reproach of the world, and the just displeasure of Heaven. His fears he is obliged to conceal; but while he assumes the appearance of intrepidity before the world, he trembles within himself; and the bold and steady eye of integrity frequently darts terror into his heart. There is, it is true, a sort of constitutional courage,

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which sometimes has rendered men daring in the most flagitious attempts. But this fool-hardiness of the rash, this boldness of the ruffian, is altogether different from real fortitude. It arises merely from warmth of blood, from want of thought, and blindness to danger. As it forms no character of value, so it appears only in occasional sallies; and never can be uniformly maintained. It requires adventitious props to support it; and, in some hour of trial, always fails. There can be no true courage, no regular persevering constancy, but what is connected with principle, and founded on a consciousness of rectitude of intention. This, and this only, erects that brazen wall, which we can oppose to every hostile attack. It clothes us with an armour, on which fortune will spend its shafts in vain. All is sound within. There is no weak place, where we particularly dread a blow. There is no occasion for false colours to be hung out. No disguise is needed to cover us. We would be satisfied if all mankind could look into our hearts. What has he to fear, who not only

acts

acts on a plan which his conscience approves, but who knows that every good man, nay, the whole unbiassed world, if they could trace his intentions, would justify and approve his conduct?

He knows, at the same time, that he is acting under the immediate eye and protection of the Almighty. *Behold, my witness is in heaven; and my record is on high.* Job, xvi. 19. Here opens a new source of fortitude to every virtuous man. The consciousness of such an illustrious spectator, invigorates and animates him. He trusts, that the eternal Lover of righteousness not only beholds and approves, but will strengthen and assist; will not suffer him to be unjustly oppressed, and will reward his constancy in the end, with glory, honour, and immortality. A good conscience, thus supported, bestows on the heart a much greater degree of intrepidity, than it could otherwise inspire. One who rests on an almighty, though invisible, Protector, exerts his powers with double force; acts with vigour not his own. Accordingly, it

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was from this principle of trust in God, that the Psalmist derived that courage and boldness, which he expresses in the text. He had said immediately before, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; the Lord is the strength of my life.* The consequence which directly follows is, *Of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.* It remains,

III. That I suggest a few considerations which may prove auxiliary to the exercise of virtuous fortitude in the midst of dangers.

From what was just now said, it appears, first, that it is of high importance to every one, who wishes to act his part with becoming resolution, to cultivate a religious principle, and to be inspired with trust in God. The imperfections of the best are indeed so numerous, as to give them no title to claim, on their own account, the protection of Heaven. But we are taught to believe, that the merciful God, who made us, and who *knows our frame,*

frame, favours the sincere and upright; that the supreme administration of the universe is always on the side of truth and virtue; and that, therefore, every worthy character, and every just and good cause, though for a while it should be depressed, is likely to receive countenance and protection in the end. The more firmly this belief is rooted in the heart, its influence will be more powerful, in surmounting the fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness or danger. The records of all nations afford a thousand remarkable instances of the effect of this principle, both on individuals, and on bodies of men. Animated by the strong belief of a just cause, and a protecting God, the *feeble have waxed strong*, and have despised dangers, sufferings, and death. Handfuls of men have defied *hosts that were encamped against them;* and have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*, have called forth a valour which astonished the world; and which could have been exerted by none, but those who fought under a divine banner.

In

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In the next place, let him who would preserve fortitude in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense of what constitutes the true honour of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank; for experience shows, that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving. It consists in being deterred by no danger when duty calls us forth; in fulfilling our allotted part, whatever it may be, with faithfulness, bravery, and constancy of mind. These qualities never fail to stamp distinction on the character. They confer on him who discovers them, an honourable superiority, which all, even enemies, feel and revere. Let every man, therefore, when the hour of danger comes, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of trial, the hour which must determine, whether he is to rise, or to sink for ever, in the esteem of all around him. If, when put to the test, he discover no firmness to maintain his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has forfeited every pretension to a manly mind. He must reckon on being exposed to general contempt;

contempt; and, what is worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own eyes he will be contemptible; than which, surely, no misery can be more severe.

But in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of the highest consequence is to have formed a just estimate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of life itself. For here lies the chief source of our weakness and pusillanimity. We over-value the advantages of fortune; rank and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by vain opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods. We hang upon them with fond attachment; and to forfeit any hope of advancement, to incur the least discredit with the world, or to be brought down but one step from the station we possess, is regarded with consternation and dismay. Hence, a thousand weights hang upon the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to mean and dishonourable compliances. What fortitude can he possess, what worthy or generous purpose can he form, who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of fortune,

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fortune, to be the chief evils which man can suffer? Put these into the balance with true honour, with conscious integrity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wise, with the favour of Almighty God, with peace of mind and hope of heaven; and then think, whether those dreaded evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing your duty. Look beyond external appearances to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to be happy with them, if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favour of the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude, on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ in order to attain the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy of your ambition?

ambition? That favour which you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost by servile compliance. The timid and abject are detected, and despised even by those whom they court; while the firm and resolute rise in the end to those honours, which the other pursued in vain.

PUT the case at the worst. Suppose not your fortune only, but your safety, to be in hazard; your life itself to be endangered, by adhering to conscience and virtue. Think, what a creeping and ignominious state you would render life, if, when your duty calls, you would expose it to no danger; if, by a dastardly behaviour, you would, at any expence, preserve it. That life which you are so anxious to preserve, can at any rate be prolonged only for a few years more; and those years may be full of woe. He who will not risk death when conscience requires him to face it, ought to be ashamed to live.——Consider as a man and a Christian, for what purpose life was given thee by Heaven. Was it,

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it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures, and ignoble sloth; flying into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No: Life was given that thou mightest come forth to act some useful and honourable part, on that theatre where thou hast been placed by Providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and, by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state.

Son of man, Remember thine original honours! Assert the dignity of thy nature! Shake off this pusillanimous dread of death; and seek to fulfil the ends for which thou wert sent forth by thy Creator!——The sentiment of a noble mind is, *I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.* To the *finishing of his course*, let every one direct his eye; and let him now appreciate life according to the value it will be found to have, when summed up at the close. This is the period which brings every thing to the test. Illusions may formerly have imposed on the world; may have

have imposed on the man himself. But all illusion then vanishes. The real character comes forth. The estimate of happiness is fairly formed. Hence it has been justly said, that no man can be pronounced either great or happy, until his last hour come. To that last hour, what will bring such satisfaction, or add so much dignity, as the reflection, on having surmounted with firmness all the discouragements of the world, and having persevered to the end in one uniform course of fidelity and honour? We remarked before, the magnanimous behaviour of the Apostle Paul, when he had persecution and distress full in view. Hear now the sentiments of the same great man, when the time of his last suffering approached; and remark the majesty and ease with which he looked on death. *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.* How many years of life does such a dying moment

2 Timothy, iv. 6, 7, 8.

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ment overbalance? Who would not choose in this manner to go off the stage, with such a song of triumph in his mouth, rather than prolong his existence through a wretched old age, stained with sin and shame?

ANIMATED by these considerations, let us nourish that fortitude of mind, which is so essential to a man and a Christian. Let no discouragement nor danger deter us from doing what is right. Through *honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report*, let us preserve fidelity to our God and our Saviour. *Though an host should encamp against us*, let us not fear to discharge our duty. God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown the conqueror with eternal rewards. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To him that overcometh*, saith our blessed Lord, *I will grant to sit with me on my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.*

Rev. ii. 10.

—iii. 21.

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On Envy.

1 Corinthians, xiii. 4.

Charity envieth not—

ENVY is a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet, arising from the advantages which others are supposed to possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards those who possess them. This is universally admitted to be one of the blackest passions in the human heart. In this world we depend much on one another; and were therefore formed by God to be mutually useful and assisting. The instincts of kindness and compassion which belong to our frame, show how much it was the intention of our Creator that we should be united in friendship. If any infringe this

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great law of nature, by acts of causeless hostility, resentment may justly arise. No one is to be condemned for defending his rights, and showing displeasure against a malicious enemy. But to conceive ill-will at one who has attacked none of our rights, nor done us any injury, solely because he is more prosperous than we are, is a disposition altogether unnatural; it suits not the human constitution, and partakes more of the rancour of an evil spirit. Hence, the character of an envious man is universally odious. All disclaim it; and they who feel themselves under the influence of this passion, carefully conceal it.

But it is proper to consider, that among all our passions, both good and bad, there are many different gradations. Sometimes they swim on the surface of the mind, without producing any internal agitation. They proceed no farther than the beginnings of passion. Allayed by our constitution, or tempered by the mixture of other dispositions, they exert no considerable influence on the temper. Though the character in which envy forms the ruling passion,

passion, and reigns in all its force, be one too odious, I hope, to be common; yet some shade, some tincture, of this evil disposition mixes with most characters in the world. It is, perhaps, one of the most prevailing infirmities to which we are subject. There are few but who, at one time or other, have found somewhat of this nature stirring within them; some lurking uneasiness in their mind, when they looked up to others, who enjoyed a greater share than had fallen to their lot, of some advantages which they wished, and thought themselves entitled, to possess. Though this should not embitter their disposition; though it should create the uneasiness only, without the malignity, of envy; yet still it is a disturbed state of mind; and always borders upon, if it actually include not, some vicious affections. In order, as far as possible, to remedy this evil, I shall now consider what are the most general grounds of the envy which men are apt to bear to others; and shall examine what foundation they afford, for any degree of this troublesome and dangerous passion.

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——The chief grounds of envy may be reduced to three: Accomplishments of mind; advantages of birth, rank, and fortune; superior success in worldly pursuits.

I. Accomplishments, or endowments of the mind. The chief endowment for which man deserves to be valued, is virtue. This unquestionably forms the most estimable distinction among mankind. Yet this, which may appear surprising, never forms any ground of envy. No man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving, than others. This may, in part, be owing to virtue producing in every one who beholds it, that high degree of respect and love, which extinguishes envy. But, probably, it is more owing to the good opinion which every one entertains of his own moral qualities. Some virtues, or at least the seeds of them, he finds within his breast. Others, he vainly attributes to himself. Those in which he is plainly deficient, he undervalues, as either not real virtues, or virtues of very inferior rank; and rests satisfied, that, on the

the whole, he is as worthy and respectable as his neighbour.

The case is different, with regard to those mental abilities and powers which are ascribed to others. As long as these are exerted in a sphere of action remote from ours, and not brought into competition with talents of the same kind, to which we have pretensions, they create no jealousy. They are viewed as distant objects, in which we have not any concern. It is not until they touch our own line, and appear to rival us in what we wish to excel, that they awaken envy. Even then, envy is, properly speaking, not grounded on the talents of others. For here, too, our self-complacency brings us relief; from the persuasion, that, were we thoroughly known, and full justice done to us, our abilities would be found not inferior to those of our rivals. What properly occasions envy, is the fruit of the accomplishments of others; the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents above ours. Hence, distinguished superi-

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ority, in genius, learning, eloquence, or any other of those various arts that attract the notice of the world, often become painful grounds of envy; not indeed to all indifferently, but to those who follow the same line of pursuit. Mere rivality, inspired by emulation, would carry no reproach; were not that rivality joined with obliquity, and a malignant spirit; did it not lead to secret detraction, and unfair methods of diminishing the reputation of others. Too frequently has such a spirit tarnished the character of those who sought to shine in the elegant arts; and who, otherwise, had a just title to fame. ——Let such as are addicted to this infirmity, consider how much they degrade themselves. Superior merit, of any kind, always rests on itself. Conscious of what it deserves, it disdains low competitions and jealousies. They who are stung with envy, especially when they allow its malignity to appear, confess a sense of their own inferiority; and, in effect, pay homage to that merit from which they endeavour to detract.

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But in order to eradicate the passion, and to cure the disquiet which it creates, let such persons farther consider, how inconsiderable the advantage is which their rivals have gained, by any superiority over them. They whom you envy, are themselves inferior to others who follow the same pursuits. For how few, how very few, have reached the summit of excellence, in the art or study which they cultivate? Even that degree of excellence which they have attained, how seldom is it allowed to them by the world, till after they die? Public applause is the most fluctuating and uncertain of all rewards. Admired as they may be by a circle of their friends, they have to look up to others, who stand above them in public opinion; and undergo the same mortifications which you suffer in looking up to them. Consider what labour it has cost them to arrive at that degree of eminence they have gained; and, after all their labour, how imperfect their recompence is at last. Within what narrow bounds is their fame confined? With what a number of

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of humiliations is it mixed? To how many are they absolutely unknown? Among those who know them, how many censure and decry them?——Attending fairly to these considerations, the envious might come in the end to discern, that the fame acquired by any accomplishment of the mind, by all that skill can contrive, or genius can execute, amounts to no more than a small elevation, raises the possessor to such an inconsiderable height above the crowd, that others may, without disquiet, sit down contented with their own mediocrity.

II. Advantages of fortune, superiority in birth, rank, and riches, even qualifications of body and form, become grounds of envy. Among external advantages, those which relate to the body ought certainly, in the comparative estimation of ourselves and others, to hold the lowest place; as in the acquisition of them we can claim no merit, but must ascribe them entirely to the gift of nature. Yet envy has often shewed itself here in full malignity; though

though a small measure of reflection might have discovered that there was little or no ground for this passion to arise. It would have proved a blessing to multitudes, to have wanted those advantages for which they are envied. How frequently, for instance, has beauty betrayed the possessors of it into many a snare, and brought upon them many a disaster? Beheld with spiteful eyes by those who are their rivals, they, in the mean time, glow with no less envy against others by whom they are surpassed; while, in the midst of their competitions, jealousies, and concealed enmities, the fading flower is easily blasted; short-lived at the best, and trifling at any rate, in comparison with the higher and more lasting beauties of the mind.

But of all the grounds of envy among men, superiority in rank and fortune is the most general. Hence the malignity which the poor commonly bear to the rich, as ingrossing to themselves all the comforts of life. Hence the evil eye, with which persons of inferior station scrutinize those who are above them in rank; and if they

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they approach to that rank, their envy is generally strongest against such as are just one step higher than themselves.—Alas! my friends, all this envious disquietude, which agitates the world, arises from a deceitful figure which imposes upon the public view. False colours are hung out: the real state of men is not what it seems to be. The order of society requires a distinction of ranks to take place; but, in point of happiness, all men come much nearer to equality than is commonly imagined; and the circumstances, which form any material difference of happiness among them, are not of that nature which renders them grounds of envy. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniencies and pleasures of the rich; but, in return, he is free from many embarrassments to which they are subject. By the simplicity and uniformity of his life, he is delivered from that variety of cares, which perplex those who have great affairs to manage, intricate plans to pursue, many enemies, perhaps, to encounter in the pursuit. In the tranquillity of his small habitation,

tation, and private family, he enjoys a peace which is often unknown at courts. The gratifications of nature, which are always the most satisfactory, are possessed by him to their full extent; and if he be a stranger to the refined pleasures of the wealthy, he is unacquainted also with the desire of them, and by consequence feels no want. His plain meal satisfies his appetite, with a relish, probably higher than that of the rich man, who sits down to his luxurious banquet. His sleep is more sound; his health more firm; he knows not what spleen, languor, or listlessness are. His accustomed employments or labours are not more oppressive to him, than the labour of attendance on courts and the great, the labours of dress, the fatigue of amusements, the very weight of idleness, frequently are to the rich. In the mean time, all the beauty of the face of nature, all the enjoyments of domestic society, all the gaiety and cheerfulness of an easy mind, are as open to him as to those of the highest rank. The splendour of retinue, the sound of titles, the appearances of high respect,

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are indeed soothing, for a short time, to the great. But, become familiar, they are soon forgotten. Custom effaces their impression. They sink into the rank of those ordinary things which daily recur, without raising any sensation of joy.—Cease, therefore, from looking up with discontent and envy to those whom birth or fortune have placed above you. Adjust the balance of happiness fairly. When you think of the enjoyments you want, think also of the troubles from which you are free. Allow their just value to the comforts you possess; and you will find reason to rest satisfied, with a very moderate, though not an opulent and splendid, condition of fortune. Often, did you know the whole, you would be inclined to pity the state of those whom you now envy.

III. Superior success in the course of worldly pursuits is a frequent ground of envy. Among all ranks of men, competitions arise. Wherever any favourite object is pursued in common, jealousies seldom fail to take place among those who

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are equally desirous of attaining it; as in that ancient instance of envy recorded of Joseph's brethren, who *hated their brother, because their father loved him more than all the rest.* " I could easily bear," says one, " that some others should be more re- " putable or famous, should be richer or " greater than I. It is but just, that this " man should enjoy the distinction to " which his splendid abilities have raised " him. It is natural for that man, to com- " mand the respect to which he is entitled " by his birth or his rank. But when I, " and another, have started in the race of " life, upon equal terms, and in the same " rank; that he, without any pretension " to uncommon merit, should have sud- " denly so far outstripped me; should " have engrossed all that public favour to " which I am no less entitled than he; " this is, what I cannot bear; my blood " boils, my spirit swells with indignation, " at this undeserved treatment I have suf- " fered from the world." Complaints of this nature are often made, by them who seek to justify the envy which they bear to their

Genesis, xxxvii. 4.

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their more prosperous neighbours. But if such persons wish not to be thought unjust, let me desire them to inquire, whether they have been altogether fair in the comparison they have made of their own merit with that of their rivals? and whether they have not themselves to blame, more than the world, for being left behind in the career of fortune? The world is not always blind, or unjust, in conferring its favours. Instances, indeed, sometimes occur, of deserving persons prevented, by a succession of cross incidents, from rising into public acceptance. But in the ordinary course of things, merit, sooner or later, receives a reward, while the greater part of men's misfortunes and disappointments can, generally, be traced to some misconduct of their own. *Wisdom bringeth to honour: the hand of the diligent maketh rich;* and, it has been said, not altogether without reason, that, of his own fortune in life, every man is the chief artificer. If Joseph was preferred by the father to all his brethren, his subsequent conduct showed how well he merited the preference.

Supposing,

Supposing, however, the world to have been unjust, in an uncommon degree, with regard to you, this will not vindicate malignity and envy towards a more prosperous competitor. You may accuse the world; but what reason have you to bear ill-will to him, who has only improved the favour which the world shewed him? If, by means that are unfair, he has risen, and, to advance himself, has acted injuriously by you, resentment is justifiable; but, if you cannot accuse him of any such improper conduct, his success alone gives no sanction to your envy. You, perhaps, preferred the enjoyment of your ease, to the stirs of a busy, or to the cares of a thoughtful, life. Retired from the world, and following your favourite inclinations, you were not always attentive to seize the opportunities which offered, for doing justice to your character, and improving your situation. Ought you then to complain, if the more active and laborious have acquired what you were negligent to gain? Consider, that if you have obtained less preferment, you have possessed more indulgence

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and ease. Consider, moreover, that the rival to whom you look up with repining eyes, though more fortunate in the world, may perhaps, on the whole, not be more happy than you. He has all the vicissitudes of the world before him. He may have much to encounter, much to suffer, from which you are protected by the greater obscurity of your station. Every situation in life, has both a bright and a dark side. Let not your attention dwell only on what is bright on the side of those you envy, and dark on your own. But, bringing into view both sides of your respective conditions, estimate fairly the sum of felicity.

Thus I have suggested several considerations, for evincing the unreasonableness of that disquietude which envy raises in our breasts; considerations, which tend at least to mitigate and allay the workings of this malignant passion, and which, in a sober mind, ought totally to extinguish it. The scope of the whole has been, to promote, in every one, contentment with his own state.

state. Many arguments of a different nature may be employed against envy; some taken from its sinful and criminal nature; some from the mischiefs to which it gives rise in the world; others, from the misery which it produces to him who nourishes this viper in his bosom. But, undoubtedly, the most efficacious arguments are such as show, that the circumstances of others, compared with our own, afford no ground for envy. The mistaken ideas which are entertained of the high importance of certain worldly advantages and distinctions, form the principal cause of our repining at our own lot, and envying that of others. To things light in themselves, our imagination has added undue weight. Did we allow reflection and wisdom to correct the prejudices which we have imbibed, and to disperse those phantoms of our own creating, the gloom which overcasts us would gradually vanish. Together with returning contentment, the sky would clear up, and every object brighten around us. It is in the sullen and dark

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shade of discontent, that noxious passions, like venomous animals, breed and prey upon the heart.

Envy is a passion of so odious a nature, that not only it is concealed as much as possible from the world, but every man is glad to dissemble the appearances of it to his own heart. Hence it is apt to grow upon him unperceived. Let him who is desirous to keep his heart chaste and pure from its influence, examine himself strictly on those dispositions which he bears towards his prosperous neighbours. Does he ever view, with secret uneasiness, the merit of others rising into notice and distinction? Does he hear their praises with unwilling ear? Does he feel an inclination to depreciate what he dares not openly blame? When obliged to commend, does his cold and aukward approbation insinuate his belief of some unknown defects in the applauded character? From such symptoms as these, he may infer that the disease of envy is forming; that the poison is beginning

ginning to spread its infection over his heart. SERMON VIII.

THE causes that nourish envy are principally two; and two which, very frequently, operate in conjunction; these are, pride and indolence. The connection of pride with envy, is obvious and direct. The high value which the proud set on their own merit, the unreasonable claims which they form on the world, and the injustice which they suppose to be done to them by any preference given to others, are perpetual sources, first of discontent, and next of envy. When indolence is joined to pride, the disease of the mind becomes more inveterate and incurable. Pride leads men to claim more than they deserve. Indolence prevents them from obtaining what they might justly claim. Disappointments follow; and spleen, malignity, and envy, rage within them. The proud and indolent are always envious. Wrapt up in their own importance, they sit still, and repine, because others are more prosperous than they; while, with all their high opi-

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nion of themselves, they have done nothing either to deserve, or to acquire, prosperity. As, therefore, we value our virtue, or our peace, let us guard against these two evil dispositions of mind. Let us be modest in our esteem, and, by diligence and industry, study to acquire the esteem of others. So shall we shut up the avenues that lead to many a bad passion; and shall learn, *in whatsoever state we are*, therewith to be content.

Finally, in order to subdue envy, let us bring often into view those religious considerations which regard us particularly as Christians. Let us remember how unworthy we are in the sight of God; and how much the blessings which each of us enjoy, are beyond what we deserve. Let us nourish reverence and submission to that Divine Government, which has appointed to every one such a condition in the world as is fittest for him to possess. Let us recollect how opposite the Christian spirit is to envy; and what sacred obligations it lays upon us, to walk in love and charity towards

towards one another. Indeed, when we reflect on the many miseries which abound in human life; on the scanty proportion of happiness which any man is here allowed to enjoy; on the small difference which the diversity of fortune makes on that scanty proportion; it is surprising that envy should ever have been a prevalent passion among men, much more that it should have prevailed among Christians. Where so much is suffered in common, little room is left for envy. There is more occasion for pity and sympathy, and inclination to assist each other. To our own good endeavours for rectifying our dispositions, let us not forget to add serious prayers to the Author of our being, that he who made the heart of man, and knows all its infirmities, would thoroughly purify our hearts from a passion so base, and so criminal, as envy. *Create in me, O God, a clean heart; and renew a right spirit within me. Search me, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Ps. li 10.

cxxxix. 23, 24.

SERMON IX.

On Idleness.

MATTHEW, XX. 6.

——*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

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IT is an observation which naturally occurs, and has been often made, that all the representations of the Christian life in Scripture are taken from active scenes; from carrying on a warfare, running a race, striving to enter in at a strait gate; and, as in this context, labouring in a vineyard. Hence the conclusion plainly follows, that various active duties are required of the Christian; and that sloth and indolence are inconsistent with his hope of heaven.

But it has been sometimes supposed, that industry, as far as it is matter of duty, regards

regards our spiritual concerns and employments only; and that one might be very busy as a Christian, who was very idle as a man. Hence, among some denominations of Christians, an opinion has prevailed, that the perfection of religion was to be found in those monastic retreats where every active function of civil life was totally excluded, and the whole time of men filled up with exercises of devotion. They who hold such opinions proceed on the supposition, that religion has little or no concern with the ordinary affairs of the world; that its duties stand apart by themselves, and mingle not in the intercourse which men have with one another. The perfect Christian was imagined to live a sort of angelic life, sequestered from the business or pleasures of this contemptible state. The gospel, on the contrary, represents the religion of Christ as intended for the benefit of human society. It assumes men as engaged in the business of active life; and directs its exhortations, accordingly, to all ranks and stations; to the magistrate and the subject, to the master and

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and the servant, to the rich and the poor, to them that buy and them that sell, them that *use* and them that *abuse* the world. Some duties, indeed, require privacy and retreat. But the most important must be performed in the midst of the world, where we are commanded to *shine as lights, and by our good works to glorify our Father which is in heaven.* This world, as the context represents it, is God's vineyard, where each of us has a task assigned him to perform. In every station, and at every period of life, labour is required. At the third, the sixth, or the eleventh hour, we are commanded to work, if we would not incur, from the great Lord of the vineyard, this reproof, *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*——We may, I confess, be busy about many things, and yet be found negligent of the *One thing needful.* We may be very active, and withal very ill employed. But though a person may be industrious without being religious, I must at the same time admonish you, that no man can be idle without being sinful. This I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of the Discourse;

course; wherein I purpose to reprove a vice which is too common among all ranks of men. Superiours admonish their inferiours, and parents tell their children, that idleness is the mother of every sin; while, in their own practice, they often set the example of what they reprobate severely in others. I shall study to show, that the idle man is, in every view, both foolish and criminal; that he neither lives to God; nor lives to the world; nor lives to himself.

I. He lives not to God. The great and wise Creator certainly does nothing in vain. A small measure of reflection might convince every one, that for some useful purpose he was sent into the world. The nature of man bears no mark of insignificancy, or neglect. He is placed at the head of all things here below. He is furnished with a great preparation of faculties and powers. He is enlightened by reason with many important discoveries; even taught by revelation to consider himself as ransomed, by the death of Christ, from misery; and intended to rise, by gradual advances,

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vances, to a still higher rank in the universe of God. In such a situation, thus distinguished, thus favoured and assisted by his Creator, can he hope to be forgiven, if he aim at no improvement, if he pursue no useful design, live for no other purpose but to indulge in sloth, consume the fruits of the earth, and to spend his days in a dream of vanity? Existence is a sacred trust; and he who thus misemploys and squanders it away, is treacherous to its Author.——Look around you, and you will behold the whole universe full of active powers. Action is, to speak so, the genius of nature. By motion and exertion, the system of being is preserved in vigour. By its different parts always acting in subordination one to another, the perfection of the whole is carried on. The heavenly bodies perpetually revolve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appointed course. Continual operations are going on in the earth, and in the waters. Nothing stands still. All is alive and stirring throughout the universe.—In the midst of this animated and busy scene, is man alone to remain

idle

idle in his place? Belongs it to him, to be the sole inactive and slothful being in the creation, when he has so much allotted him to do; when in so many various ways he might improve his own nature; might advance the glory of the God who made him; and contribute his part to the general good?

Hardly is there any feeling of the human heart more natural, or more universal, than that of our being accountable to God. It is, what the most profligate can never totally erase. Almost all nations have agreed in the belief, that there is to come some period when the Almighty will act as the Judge of his creatures. Presentiments of this, work in every breast. Conscience has already erected a tribunal, on which it anticipates the sentence which at that period shall be passed. Before this tribunal let us sometimes place ourselves in serious thought, and consider what account we are prepared to give of our conduct to Him who made us. "I placed you," the great Judge may then be supposed to say, "in a station where you had many occa-

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" sions for action, and many opportunities " of improvement. You were taught, and " you knew, your duty. Throughout a " course of years I continued your life. I " surrounded you with friends to whom " you might be useful. I gave you health, " ease, leisure, and various advantages of " situation.——Where are the fruits of " those talents which you possessed? " What good have you done with them " to yourselves? What good to others? " How have you filled up your place, or " answered your destination in the world? " Produce some evidence, of your not " having existed altogether in vain."—— Let such as are now mere blanks in the world, and a burthen to the earth, think what answer they will give to those awful questions.

II The idle live not to the world, and their fellow-creatures around them, any more than they do to God. Had any man a title to stand alone, and to be independent of his fellows, he might then consider himself as at liberty to indulge in solitary ease

ease and sloth, without being responsible to others for the manner in which he chose to live. But, on the face of the earth, there is no such person, from the king on his throne, to the beggar in his cottage. We are all connected with one another, by various relations; which create a chain of mutual dependence, reaching from the highest to the lowest station in society. The order and happiness of the world cannot be maintained, without perpetual circulation of active duties and offices, which all are called upon to perform in their turn. Superiours are no more independent of their inferiours, than these inferiours are of them. Each have demands and claims upon the other; and he, who in any situation of life refuses to act his part, and to contribute his share to the general stock of felicity, deserves to be proscribed from society, as an unworthy member. *If any man will not work*, says the Apostle Paul, *neither should he eat.* If he will do nothing to advance the purposes of society, he has no title to enjoy the advantages of it.

2 Thes. iii. 10.

It

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It is sometimes supposed, that industry and diligence are duties required of the poor alone, and that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to be useful is proportionably increased. The claims upon him, from various quarters, multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand. Even supposing him exempted from exerting himself in behalf of his inferiours, supposing the relation between superiours and inferiours abolished, the relation among equals must still subsist. If there be no man, however high in rank, who stands not frequently in need of the good offices of his friends, does he think that he owes nothing to them in return? Can he fold his arms in selfish indolence, and expect to be served by others, if he will not exert himself in doing service to any?——Were there no other call to industry, but the relation in which every one stands to his own family, the remembrance

brance of this alone should make the man of idleness blush. Pretends he to love those with whom he is connected by the dearest ties, and yet will he not bestir himself for their guidance, their support, or their advancement in the world? How immoral, and cruel, is the part he acts, who slumbers in sensual ease, while the wants and demands of a helpless family cry aloud, but cry in vain, for his vigorous exertions? Is this a husband, is this a father, that deserves to be honoured with those sacred names? How many voices will be lifted up against him at the last day! Let such persons remember the awful words in Scripture, and tremble It is written in the First Epistle to Timothy, the fifth chapter and eighth verse, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

III. The idle man lives not to himself, with any more advantage than he lives to the world. It is indeed on a supposition

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entirely opposite, that persons of this character proceed. They imagine that, how deficient soever they may be in point of duty, they at least consult their own satisfaction. They leave to others the drudgery of life; and betake themselves, as they think, to the quarter of enjoyment and ease. Now, in contradiction to this, I assert, and hope to prove, that the idle man, first, shuts the door against all improvement; next, that he opens it wide to every destructive folly; and, lastly, that he excludes himself from the true enjoyment of pleasure.

First, He shuts the door against improvement of every kind, whether of mind, body, or fortune. The law of our nature, the condition under which we are placed from our birth, is, that nothing good or great is to be acquired, without toil and industry. A price is appointed by Providence to be paid for every thing; and the price of improvement, is labour. Industry may, indeed, be sometimes disappointed. *The race* may not be always

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to the swift, nor *the battle to the strong*. But, at the same time, it is certain that, in the ordinary course of things, without strength, the battle cannot be gained; without swiftness, the race cannot be run with success. *In all labour*, says the wise man, *there is profit; but the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing*. If we consult either the improvement of the mind, or the health of the body, it is well known that exercise is the great instrument of promoting both. Sloth enfeebles equally the bodily and the mental powers. As in the animal system it engenders disease, so on the faculties of the soul it brings a fatal rust, which corrodes and wastes them; which, in a short time, reduces the brightest genius to the same level with the meanest understanding. The great differences which take place among men, are not owing to a distinction, that nature has made in their original powers, so much as to the superiour diligence with which some have improved these powers beyond others. To no purpose do we possess the seeds of many

Prov. xiv. 23; xiii. 4.

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great abilities, if they are suffered to lie dormant within us. It is not the latent possession, but the active exertion of them, which gives them merit. Thousands whom indolence has sunk into contemp ble obscurity, might have come forward to the highest distinction, if idleness had not frustrated the effect of all their powers.

Instead of going on to improvement, all things go to decline, with the idle man. His character falls into contempt. His fortune is consumed. Disorder, confusion, and embarrassment, mark his whole situation. Observe in what lively colours the state of his affairs is described by Solomon. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: And, lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof; and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.* In the midst, too, of those distresses which idleness brings on its votaries, they must submit to innumerable

Prov. xxiv. 30, 31, 32.

rable mortifications, which never fail to attend their shameful conduct. They must reckon, on seeing themselves contemned by the virtuous and wise, and slighted by the thriving part of mankind. They must expect to be left behind by every competitor for rank or fortune. They will be obliged to humble themselves before persons, now far their superiours in the world, whom, once, they would have disdained to acknowledge as their equals.——It is in this manner that a man lives to himself? Are these the advantages, which were expected to be found in the lap of ease? The down may at first have appeared soft: But it will soon be found to cover thorns innumerable. *How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want, as an armed man.*——But this is only a small part of the evils which persons of this description bring on themselves: For,

Prov. xxiv. 33. 34.

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In the second place, while in this manner they shut the door against every improvement, they open it wide to the most destructive vices and follies. The human mind cannot remain always unemployed. Its passions must have some exercise. If we supply them not with proper employment, they are sure to run loose into riot and disorder. While we are unoccupied by what is good, evil is continually at hand; and hence it is said in Scripture, that as soon as Satan *found the house empty*, he took possession, and filled it with *evil spirits*. Every man who recollects his conduct, may be satisfied, that his hours of idleness have always proved the hours most dangerous to virtue. It was then that criminal desires arose; guilty pursuits were suggested; and designs were formed, which, in their issue, have disquieted and embittered his whole life. If seasons of idleness be dangerous, what must a continued habit of it prove? Habitual indolence, by a silent and secret progress, undermines every virtue in the soul. More violent passions

Matthew, xii. 44.

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run their course, and terminate. They are like rapid torrents, which foam, and swell, and bear down every thing before them. But after having overflowed their banks, their impetuosity subsides. They return, by degrees, into their natural channel; and the damage which they have done, can be repaired. Sloth is like the slowly-flowing, putrid stream, which stagnates in the marsh, breeds venomous animals, and poisonous plants; and infects with pestilential vapours the whole country round it. Having once tainted the soul, it leaves no part of it sound; and, at the same time, gives not those alarms to conscience, which the eruptions of bolder and fiercer emotions often occasion. The disease which it brings on, is creeping and insidious; and is, on that account, more certainly mortal.

One constant effect of idleness is, to nourish the passions, and, of course, to heighten our demands for gratification; while it unhappily withdraws from us the proper means of gratifying these demands. If the desires of the industrious man be

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set upon opulence or rank, upon the conveniences or the splendour of life, he can accomplish his desires by methods which are fair and allowable. The idle man has the same desires with the industrious, but not the same resources for compassing his ends by honourable means. He must therefore turn himself to seek by fraud, or by violence, what he cannot submit to acquire by industry. Hence the origin of those multiplied crimes to which idleness is daily giving birth in the world; and which contribute so much to violate the order, and to disturb the peace, of society. —In general, the children of idleness may be ranked under two denominations or classes of men; both of whom may, too justly, be termed, The children of the devil. Either, incapable of any effort, they are such as sink into absolute meanness of character, and contentedly wallow with the drunkard and debauchee, among the herd of the sensual; until poverty overtakes them, or disease cuts them off: Or, they are such as, retaining some remains of vigour, are impelled, by their passions,

passions, to venture on a desperate attempt for retrieving their ruined fortunes. In this case, they employ the art of the fraudulent gamester to ensnare the unwary. They issue forth with the highwayman to plunder on the road; or, with the thief and the robber, they infest the city by night. From this class, our prisons are peopled; and by them the scaffold is furnished with those melancholy admonitions, which are so often delivered from it to the crowd. Such are frequently the tragical, but well-known, consequences of the vice against which I now warn you.

In the third, and last place, how dangerous soever idleness may be to virtue, are there not pleasures, it may be said, which attend it? Is there not ground to plead, that it brings a release from the oppressive cares of the world; and sooths the mind with a gentle satisfaction, which is not to be found amidst the toils of a busy and active life?——This is an advantage which, least of all others, we admit

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mit it to possess. In behalf of incessant labour, no man contends. Occasional release from toil, and indulgence of ease, is what nature demands, and virtue allows. But what we assert is, that nothing is so great an enemy to the lively and spirited enjoyment of life, as a relaxed and indolent habit of mind. He who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy. The felicity of human life depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or object, which keeps awake and enlivens all our powers. Our happiness consists in the pursuit, much more than in the attainment, of any temporal good. Rest is agreeable; but it is only from preceding labours that rest acquires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and sickens; and the pleasures which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity. To this, let that miserable set of men bear witness, who, after spending great part of their life in active industry, have retired to what they fancied

fancied was to be a pleasing enjoyment of themselves, in wealthy inactivity, and profound repose. Where they expected to find an elysium, they have found nothing but a dreary and comfortless waste. Their days have dragged on, in uniform languor; with the melancholy remembrance often returning, of the cheerful hours they passed, when they were engaged in the honest business and labours of the world.

We appeal to every one who has the least knowledge or observation of life, whether the busy, or the idle, have the most agreeable enjoyment of themselves? Compare them in their families. Compare them in the societies with which they mingle; and remark, which of them discover most cheerfulness and gaiety; which possess the most regular flow of spirits; whose temper is most equal; whose good humour, most unclouded. While the active and diligent both enliven and enjoy society, the idle are not only a burden to themselves, but a burden to those with whom they are connected; a nuisance

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nuisance to all whom they oppress with their company. On whom does time hang so heavy, as on the slothful and lazy? To whom are the hours so lingering? Who are so often devoured with spleen, are obliged to fly to every expedient which can help them to get rid of themselves? Instead of producing tranquillity, indolence produces a fretful restlessness of mind; gives rise to cravings which are never satisfied; nourishes a sickly effeminate delicacy, which sours and corrupts every pleasure.

Enough has now been said to convince every thinking person, of the folly, the guilt, and the misery, of an idle state. Let these admonitions stir us up, to exert ourselves in our different occupations, with that virtuous activity which becomes men and Christians. Let us arise from the bed of sloth; distribute our time with attention and care; and improve to advantage the opportunities which Providence has bestowed. The material business in which our several stations engage us,

us, may often prove not sufficient to occupy the whole of our time and attention. In the life even of busy men, there are frequent intervals of leisure. Let them take care, that into these, none of the vices of idleness creep. Let some secondary, some subsidiary employment, of fair and laudable kind, be always at hand to fill up those vacant spaces of life, which too many assign, either to corrupting amusements, or to mere inaction. We ought never to forget, that entire idleness always borders, either on misery, or on guilt.

At the same time, let the course of our employments be ordered in such a manner, that in carrying them on, we may be also promoting our eternal interest. With the business of the world, let us properly intermix the exercises of devotion. By religious duties, and virtuous actions, let us study to prepare ourselves for a better world. In the midst of our labours for this life, it is never to be forgotten, that we must *first seek the kingdom*

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kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and *give diligence to make our calling and election sure.* Otherwise, how active soever we may seem to be, our whole activity will prove only a laborious idleness: We shall appear, in the end, to have been busy to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Then only we fulfil the proper character of Christians, when we join that pious zeal which becomes us as the servants of God, with that industry which is required of us, as good members of society; when, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, we are found *not slothful in business,* and, at the same time, *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*

Romans, xii. 11.

SERMON X.

On the SENSE of the DIVINE PRESENCE.

PSALM lxxiii. 23.

——I am continually with thee——

WE live in a world which is full of the Divine presence and power. We behold every where around us the traces of that supreme goodness which enlivens and supports the universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to day; and night sheweth knowledge of it to night.* Yet, surrounded as we are with the perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand objects, to confess his presence, it is both the misfortune and the crime of a great part of mankind that they are strangers to Him, in whose world they dwell.

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dwell. Occupied with nothing but their pursuits of interest and pleasure, they pass through this world, as though God were not there. The virtuous and reflecting are particularly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habitual sense of the Divine Presence which characterises the former. To them, nothing appears void of God. They contemplate his perfections in the works of nature; and they trace his Providence in the incidents of life. When retired from the world, he often employs their meditation. When engaged in action, he always influences their conduct. Wherever a pious man is, or whatever he does, in the style of the text, he is *continually with God.*

The happy effect of this sentiment on the heart, is fully displayed in the context. We see it allaying all the disquiet which the Psalmist, in the preceding verses, describes himself to have suffered on account of the prosperity of the wicked. The first reflection which restored tranquillity to his mind, was the remem-

remembrance of the presence of God. *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand.* He came sensible, that whatever distresses the righteous might suffer for a time, they could not fail of being compensated in the end, by that Almighty Protector, whose propitious presence ever continued to surround them. Whereupon follow those memorable expressions of his trust and joy in God. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee.*

There are principally two effects, which the sense of the Divine Presence is fitted to produce upon men. One is, to restrain them from vice; the other, to encourage their virtue. Its operation, as a check upon the sinner, is obvious. The perpetual presence of so powerful and venerable a witness, is one of the most awful considerations which can be addressed to the dissolute. It removes all

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the security which secrecy can be supposed to give to crimes. It aggravates the guilt of them, from being committed in face of the Almighty; and has power to strike terror into the heart of the greatest criminal, in the midst of his misdeeds. While this principle of religion thus checks and terrifies the sinner, it produces also another effect, that of strengthening, and comforting the good man, in the practice of his duty. It is the influence of the Divine Presence on good men, which, in consequence of the Psalmist's sentiment, I purpose to consider. To their character, it belongs to *be continually with God.* I shall endeavour to show the high benefit and comfort which they derive from such a habit of mind; and shall, for this end, first consider their internal moral state; and next, view them as they are affected by several of the external accidents and situations of life.

Let us begin with considering them in their internal state. The belief of Divine Presence acts upon them here, first, as an incitement

incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that, in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth; and should accustom ourselves to act, as if he were standing by, and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow-creatures, none are insensible. There are few, who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observation of the public; what is the presence of the greatest or wisest men on earth, to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us? The man who realizes to his mind this august Presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity.

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He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances; and the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity, those talents and virtues which were entitled to command the highest esteem. But He, in whose presence the good man acts, is both an impartial, and an unerring, judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the meanest and the greatest; and his approbation confers eternal rewards. The man therefore, who *sets the Lord always before him*, is prompted to excel in virtue, by motives which are peculiar

peculiar to himself, and which engage, on the side of duty, both honour and interest. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.*

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Psalm cxix. 168.

SUPPOSING, however, his virtuous endeavours to be faithful, many imperfections will attend them. A faultless tenor of unblemished life, is beyond the reach of man. Passions will sometimes overcome him; and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual Presence brings relief to the heart. It acted before as an animating principle. It now acts as a principle of comfort. In the midst of many imperfections, a virtuous man appeals to his Divine witness, for the sincerity of his intentions. He can appeal to Him who *knows his frame*,

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that, in the general train of his conduct, it is his study to keep the law of God.

Mere law, among men, is rigid and inflexible. As no human law-giver can look into the hearts of his subjects, he cannot, even though he were ever present with them, estimate their character exactly. He can make no allowance for particular situations. He must prescribe the same terms to all whom he rules; and treat all alike, according to their outward actions. But every minute diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but from what they seek to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances which render the trial of their virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the whisper of devotion as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action.

action. Good men, therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their heart. Though they may sometimes have erred from the right path, they can look up to Him who is ever with them, and say, as an Apostle, who had grievously offended, once said to his great Master, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* John, xxi. 17.

Appealing thus to their omniscient witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the hope of his clemency. At the same time, it is the peculiar advantage of this sentiment of the Divine Presence, that it prevents such hope from flattering them too much, or rising into undue presumption. For while it encourages, it tends also to humble, a pious man. If it encourage him, by the reflection on all his good dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him, by the remembrance, that *his secret sins* also *are ever in the light of the Divine countenance.* So that, by dwelling under the sense of God being conti-

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nually with us, we keep alive the proper temper of a Christian in the soul; humility, without dejection; fear, mingled with hope. We are cheered, without being lifted up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing eye of justice; but are comforted with the thoughts of that mercy, which, through Jesus Christ, the Discerner of all Hearts, holds forth to the sincere and penitent.—Such are the blessed effects which this principle of religion produces upon the inward moral state of a good man. Let us now,

In the second place, consider his external circumstances; and examine the influence which the same principle has upon his happiness, in several different situations of life.

Let us first view him in what the world calls prosperity; when his circumstances are easy or affluent, and his life flows in a smooth untroubled stream. Here, it might be thought, that a sense of the Divine Presence could operate upon

upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting temperance, and restraining the disorders incident to a prosperous state. Valuable effects, indeed, these are; and most conducive to the true enjoyment of all that is agreeable in life. But though it, doubtless, does exert this salutary influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security, and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He who is without a sense of God upon his mind, beholds in human affairs nothing but a perpetual fluctuation, and vicissitude of events. He is surrounded with unknown causes, which may be working his destruction in secret. He cannot avoid perceiving, that there hangs over him the irresistible arm of that Providence, whose displeasure he has done nothing to stay or avert. But he who, in the day of prosperity, dwells with God, is delivered from those disquieting alarms. He dwells as with a friend and protector, from whom he conceives his blessings to proceed.

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proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts that the God whom he serves, will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver, mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. While to the mere worldly man, the whole frame of nature is only a vast irregular fabric; and the course of human affairs no more than a confused succession of fortuitous events: all nature is beautified, and every agreeable incident is enlivened, to him who beholds God in all things. Hence arise a variety of pleasing sensations, to fill up

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those solitary hours, in which external prosperity supplies him with no entertainment. In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its author. In its sublime objects, he admires his majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores his power. He dwells in this world as in a magnificent temple, which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him, from a thousand altars. Such ideas exalt and ennoble the human mind; and reflect an additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters into the appointed trial of his virtue; and, in one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God.

Is

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Is he, for instance, thrown into an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his estate? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten of God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows, that he will not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite variety of being, or lost in the immensity of his works. The poor man can, with as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee: Thou holdest me by my right hand.* The gracious presence of that Supreme Being is affected by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the virtuous and upright; like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of kings. In the presence of the great Lord of heaven and earth, all the distinctions which vanity has contrived to make among men, totally disappear. All ranks

ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor* here indeed *meet together;* without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this, lifts the poor man above contempt; supports his spirits, when apt to be dejected; and bestows dignity on the part which he acts. How inconsiderable soever that part may appear in the estimation of an injudicious world, it is ennobled, when virtuously performed, by the approbation of his Divine witness. He can bear with indifference the scorn of the proud, as long as he knows, that there is one higher than the highest to regard him. He can enjoy himself with pleasure in his mean habitation, because he believes that God dwells with him there. The Divine Presence cheers to him the most lonely retreat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regions of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to *dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*, even there God's *hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him.* Though left without

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without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

But though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and reproach may be the lot of the servant of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued; his character unjustly traduced; and, to the open reviling of enemies, the more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal, but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? How frequently, amidst the injustice and oppression of the world, has distressed innocence had no other relief but this? "God is my witness. God is my avenger. "He hath seen it, and he will repay." A good conscience, it is true, is, of itself, a powerful support. But God is Lord of the conscience; and it is only when connected

nected with a sense of Divine Presence and approbation, that a good conscience becomes a steady principle of fortitude in the mind, under all discouragements. Hence, a virtuous man possesses a high degree of independence, both on the praise and on the censure of the world. It is enough to him, if, when undergoing the same reproaches which Job suffered from his mistaken friends, he can say with him, *Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.* He affects not to divulge his good deeds to the world. He is without concern whether the world be acquainted with them or not. He knoweth that his *Father which is in heaven seeth in secret;* and that *his prayers and his alms come up* in grateful *memorial before him. With me, it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me, is the Lord.* He *shall bring forth my righteousness*, at last, *as the light, and my judgment as the noon day.* In this consciousness of integrity, he looks down with indifference, as from a superiour station, upon the harsh censures

Job xvi. 19.

1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

of

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of a giddy and ignorant world. The sense of being continually with God, diffuses over his soul a holy calm, which unjust reproach cannot disturb. In the presence of that august and venerable witness, all the noise and clamours of men, like the murmurings of a distant storm, die away.

Lastly, Supposing the character of a good man to be untainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished; many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the distresses to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him; and his heart left to feed in silence on his own bitterness. He may labour under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually moulder into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his state; or may be obliged to prepare himself for taking farewel of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful than what arises from the presence

sence of a Divine protector and guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. *To him*, says the Psalmist, *I poured out my complaint. I shewed before him my trouble. I looked on my right hand, and viewed; but, behold there was no man who cared for my soul. I said unto thee, O Lord, thou art my refuge. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

Psalm cxlii. 2, 3, 4.

We all know, that to communicate our grief to a faithful friend, often gives ease and relief to the burdened heart. Such communication we are encouraged to make, and such relief we may expect to find, in pouring out our heart before that God *in whom compassions flow*. We may have no earthly friend to whom we can with full confidence disclose all our sorrows; or we may want words in which to express them. But God is the searcher of all hearts; and the hearer of all prayers. To the secret anguish of the soul, he is no inattentive witness. Every groan which is heaved from the labour-

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ing bosom, though heard by no human ear, reaches his throne. As he *knows our frame*, so he *remembers we are dust;* and thence *light arises to the upright in darkness.* For the hope naturally springs, that this beneficent Being will pity them, *as a father pitieth his children;* and, in the midst of those distresses which the present circumstances of man render unavoidable, will *send them help from his sanctuary.* Surrounded with this compassionate presence of the Almighty, good men never view themselves as left in this vale of tears, to bear, solitary and alone, the whole weight of human woe. In their dark, as well as in their brighter hours, God is with them. Even in that valley of the shadow of death, where no friend, no comforter, can go along to aid them, he is with them still. In the last extremity of nature, *the rod and staff of the Shepherd of Israel support them.*

THUS I have shown, though in an imperfect manner, what benefits holy men derive

derive from a habitual sense of the Divine Presence. It animates and strengthens their virtue. It enlivens and brightens their prosperity. Under various forms of adversity, it affords them consolation and relief.—Such considerations, undoubtedly, form a strong argument in favour of a devout spirit, and a virtuous life. But they are considerations which may, probably, be regarded by some, as ideal and visionary; requiring aid from a heated, or an enthusiastic, fancy, in order to give them force. I readily admit, that, amidst the hurry and turbulence of the world, it may be difficult to bring these religious sentiments as fully into view, as is necessary for their making a just impression on the soul. This requires the effort of an intelligent and feeling mind; and therefore cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unreflecting crowd, nothing appears real, but what is exposed to sense. What is invisible, is the same to them, as if it had no existence. But by the grossness of their own conceptions,

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they have no title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all considerations taken from the sense of the Divine Presence as visionary and enthusiastic, it can, on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only, but to natural, religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For if he exists, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and especially must know what passes within the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge. To be every where present, is the attribute of his nature, which, of all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This, accordingly, is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to him. All nations have believed in it. All societies

cieties appeal to it, in the solemnities of an oath, by which they determine controversies. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences which I have deduced from it, plainly and naturally follow: And every good man has ground to say, *O Lord, I am continually with thee.*

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On Patience.

LUKE, xxi. 19.

In your Patience possess ye your souls.

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THE *possession of our souls* is a very emphatical expression. It describes that state in which a man has both the full command, and the undisturbed enjoyment, of himself; in opposition to his undergoing some inward agitation which discomposes his powers. Upon the least reflection it must appear, how essential such a state of mind is to happiness. He only who thus *possesses his soul*, is capable of possessing any other thing with advantage; and, in order to attain and preserve this self-possession, the most important requisite is, the habitual exercise of patience.

I know

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I know that patience is apt to be ranked, by many, among the more humble and obscure virtues; belonging chiefly to those who groan on a sick bed, or who languish in a prison. If their situation be, happily, of a different kind, they imagine that there is no occasion for the discipline of patience being preached to them. But I hope to make it appear, that, in every circumstance of life, no virtue is more important, both to duty and to happiness; or more requisite for forming a manly and worthy character. It is not confined to a situation of continued adversity. It principally, indeed, regards the disagreeable circumstances which are apt to occur. But in our present state, the occurrence of these is so frequent, that, in every condition of life, Patience is incessantly called forth. Prosperity cannot be enjoyed, any more than adversity supported, without it. It must enter into the temper, and form the habit of the soul, if we would pass through the world with tranquillity and honour. What I purpose is to point out some of the chief occasions on which

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Patience is required; and to recommend and enforce the exercise of it, in order to *our possessing our souls.*

I. PATIENCE under provocations. The wide circle of human society is diversified by an endless variety of characters, dispositions, and passions. Uniformity is, in no respect, the genius of the world. Every man is marked by some peculiarity which distinguishes him from another; and no where can two individuals be found who are exactly, and in all respects, alike. Where so much diversity obtains, it cannot but happen, that, in the intercourse which men are obliged to maintain, their tempers shall often be ill adjusted to that intercourse; shall jar, and interfere with each other. Hence, in every station, the highest as well as the lowest, and in every condition of life, public, private, and domestic, occasions of irritation frequently arise. We are provoked, sometimes by the folly and levity of those with whom we are connected; sometimes by their indifference,

or

or neglect; by the incivility of a friend, the haughtiness of a superiour, or the insolent behaviour of one in lower station. Hardly a day passes, without somewhat or other occurring, which serves to ruffle the man of impatient spirit. Of course, such a man lives in a continual storm. He knows not what it is to enjoy a train of good humour. Servants, neighbours, friends, spouse, and children, all, through the unrestrained violence of his temper, become sources of disturbance and vexation to him. In vain is affluence; in vain are health and prosperity. The least trifle is sufficient to discompose his mind, and poison his pleasures. His very amusements are mixed with turbulence and passion.

I would beseech this man to consider, of what small moment the provocations which he receives, or at least imagines himself to receive, are really in themselves; but of what great moment he makes them, by suffering them to deprive him of the possession of himself. I would beseech him to consider, how many hours

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hours of happiness he throws away, which a little more patience would allow him to enjoy; and how much he puts it in the power of the most insignificant persons to render him miserable. "But who can ex-" pect," we hear him exclaim, "that he " is to possess the insensibility of a stone? " How is it possible for human nature to " endure so many repeated provocations? " or to bear calmly with such unrea-" sonable behaviour?"—My brother! If you can bear with no instances of unreasonable behaviour, withdraw yourself from the world. You are no longer fit to live in it. Leave the intercourse of men. Retreat to the mountain and the desert; or shut yourself up in a cell. For here, in the midst of society, *offences must come.* You might as well expect, when you beheld a calm atmosphere, and a clear sky, that no clouds were ever to rise, and no winds to blow, as that your life was long to proceed, without receiving provocations from human frailty. The careless and the imprudent, the giddy and the fickle, the ungrateful and the interested, every where meet

meet us. They are the briars and the thorns, with which the paths of human life are beset. He only who can hold his course among them with patience and equanimity, he who is prepared to bear what he must expect to happen, is worthy of the name of a man.

Did you only preserve yourself composed for a moment, you would perceive the insignificancy of most of those provocations which you magnify so highly. When a few suns more have rolled over your head, the storm will have, of itself, subsided; the cause of your present impatience and disturbance will be utterly forgotten. Can you not, then, anticipate this hour of calmness to yourself; and begin to enjoy the peace which it will certainly bring? If others have behaved improperly, leave them to their own folly, without becoming the victim of their caprice, and punishing yourself on their account.——Patience, in this exercise of it, cannot be too much studied by all who wish their life to flow in a smooth stream. It is the reason of a man, in opposition to the

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the passion of a child. It is the enjoyment of peace, in opposition to uproar and confusion. *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*—The next important exercise of Patience is,

Proverbs, xxv. 28.

II. Patience under disappointments. These will often happen to the best and wisest men; sometimes to the wisest and best-concerted plans. They may happen, too, not through any imprudence of those who have devised the plan, not even through the malice or ill design of others; but merely in consequence of some of those cross incidents of life which could not be foreseen. On such occasions, persons of a warm and sanguine temper are presently in a ferment. They had formed their hopes, as they think, upon the justest grounds. They had waited long for success; and borne with many delays. But when their designs are brought to so unexpected an issue; when, without any fault of their own, they find their hopes finally blasted, all patience forsakes them; they

they no longer possess their souls; the most passionate exclamations break forth. "To whom, except to them, could such "a disappointment have happened? Since "the creation of the world, was such a "combination of disastrous incidents ever "beheld? Why are they doomed to be "so unfortunate beyond all others?"—— Alas! how unskilfully have you calculated the course of human events? How rashly and presumptuously had you trusted to success? To whom was it ever given, to guard against all the vicissitudes, which the fluctuating *fashion of the world* is incessantly bringing about? If one friend, to whom you looked up, has died, or another has lost his influence and power; if the opinion of the public is changed, and its favour has been withdrawn; if some mistakes have occurred to lessen the goodwill of a patron on whom you depended; if, through the concurrence of these, or such like circumstances, a more fortunate rival has prevailed against you; what is there in all this, that differs from the ordinary lot of man? Are we not, each in his turn,

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turn, doomed to experience the uncertainty of worldly pursuits? Why, then, aggravate our misfortunes by the unreasonable violence of an impatient spirit? If our designs have failed through rashness or misconduct, let us blame ourselves. If they have failed through circumstances which we could not prevent, let us submit to the fate of man; and wait, with patience, till a more favourable opportunity shall occur of regaining success.

Meanwhile, let us turn to the other side of the prospect; and calmly consider how dubious it was, whether the success which we longed for, would have proved a blessing. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* Perhaps, the accomplishment of our designs might have been pregnant with misery. Perhaps, from our present disappointment, future prosperity may rise. Of such unlooked-for issues, we all know there have been many examples. Who can tell, whether our case may not add one to the number?—At any rate, let us recollect, that there is a Supreme Ruler,

Ruler, who disposes of the affairs of men; under whom, all second causes work only as subordinate agents. Looking up to that irresistible arm which is stretched over our heads, let us be calm; let us submit, and adore. Either to despair, or to rage, under disappointments, is sinful. By the former, we injure ourselves; by the latter, we insult Providence, and provoke its displeasure to continue. *To possess our souls in patience* is, at once, our wisdom as men, and our duty as Christians. The benefits of this virtue are so often repeated in this world, that good policy alone would recommend it to every thinking man. Disappointments derange, and overcome, vulgar minds. The patient and the wise, by a proper improvement, frequently make them contribute to their high advantage.—Let me next recommend,

III. Patience under restraints. Numerous are the restraints imposed on us, by the nature of the human condition. To the restraints of authority and law, all must

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must submit. The restraints of education and discipline lie on the young. Considerations of health restrain the indulgence of pleasure. Attentions to fortune restrain expence. Regard to friends, whom we are bound to please; respect to established customs, and to the opinions of society, impose restraint on our general behaviour. There is no man, in any rank of life, who is always at liberty to act according as he would incline. In some quarter or other, he is limited by circumstances, that either actually confine, or that ought at least to confine and restrain him.

These restraints, the impatient are apt to scorn. They will needs burst the barriers which reason had erected, or their situation had formed; and, without regard to consequences, give free scope to their present wish. Hence, many dangerous excesses flow; much confusion and misery are produced in human life. Had men the patience to submit to their condition, and to wait till it should allow them a freer indulgence of their desires, they might,

might, in a short time, obtain the power of gratifying them with safety. If the young, for instance, would undergo, with patience, the labours of education, they would rise, at a proper period, to honours, riches, or ease. If the infirm would, with patience, bear the regulations which their constitution demands, they might regain the comforts of health. If persons of straitened fortune had patience to comform themselves to their circumstances, and to abridge their pleasures, they might, by degrees, improve and advance their state. Whereas, by eagerness of temper, and precipitancy of indulgence, they forfeit all the advantages which patience would have procured; and incur the opposite evils to their full extent.

In the present state of human affairs, no lesson is more necessary to be learned by all, to be inculcated on the young, and to be practised by the old, than that of patient submission to necessity. For, under the law of necessity, we are all in-

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evitably placed. No man is, or can be, always his own master. We are obliged, in a thousand cases, to submit and obey. The discipline of patience preserves our minds easy, by conforming them to our state. By the impetuosity of an impatient and unsubmitting temper, we fight against an unconquerable power; and aggravate the evils we must endure.—Another important exercise of the virtue concerning which we discourse, is,

IV. Patience under injuries and wrongs. To these, amidst the present confusion of the world, all are exposed. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt men from being attacked by rashness, malice, or envy. To behave under such attacks with due patience and moderation, is, it must be confessed, one of the most trying exercises of virtue.—But, in order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe, that a tame submission to wrongs is not required by religion. We are, by no means, to imagine,

gine, that religion tends to extinguish the sense of honour, or to suppress the exertion of a manly spirit. It is under a false apprehension of this kind, that Christian patience is sometimes stigmatised in discourse as no other than a different name for cowardice. On the contrary, every man of virtue ought to feel what is due to his character, and to support properly his own rights. Resentment of wrong, is an useful principle in human nature; and for the wisest purposes, was implanted in our frame. It is the necessary guard of private rights; and the great restraint on the insolence of the violent, who, if no resistance were made, would trample on the gentle and peaceable.

Resentment, however, if not kept within due bounds, is in hazard of rising into fierce and cruel revenge. It is the office of patience, to temper resentment by reason. In this view, it is most properly described in the Text, by a man's *possessing his soul;* acting the part which self-defence, which justice, or honour, require him to act, without being transported out

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of himself by the vehemence of anger; or insisting on such degrees of reparation as bear no proportion to the wrong that he has suffered. What proportion, for instance, is there between the life of a man, and an affront received by some rash expression in conversation, which the wise would have slighted; and which, in the course of a few weeks, would have been forgotten by every one? How fantastic, then, how unjustifiable, are those supposed laws of modern honour, which, for such an affront, require no less reparation than the death of a fellow-creature; and which, to obtain this reparation, require a man to endanger his own life? Laws, which, as they have no foundation in reason, never received the least sanction from any of the wise and polished nations of antiquity; but were devised in the darkest ages of the world, and are derived to us from the ferocious barbarity of Gothic manners.

Nothing is so inconsistent with self-possession as violent anger. It overpowers reason; confounds our ideas; distorts the appearance,

appearance, and blackens the colour, of every object. By the storm which it raises within, and by the mischiefs which it occasions without, it generally brings, on the passionate and revengeful man, greater misery than he can bring on his enemy. Patience allays this destructive tempest, by making room for the return of calm and sober thought. It suspends the blow which sudden resentment was ready to inflict. It disposes us attend to the alleviating circumstances, which may be discovered in the midst of the wrongs we suppose ourselves to have suffered. Hence it naturally inclines to the moderate and gentle side; and while it allows all proper measures to be taken, both for safety, and for just redress, it makes way for returning peace. Without some degree of patience exercised under injuries, human life would be rendered a state of perpetual hostility; offences and retaliations would succeed to one another in endless train; and the world would become a field of blood.—It now remains to recommend,

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V. PATIENCE under adversity and affliction. This is the most common sense in which this virtue is understood; as it respects disease, poverty, old age, loss of friends, and the other calamities which are incident to human life. *Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.* The various duties to which patience, under this view, gives rise, afford a larger subject to discourse than I am at present to pursue. In general, there are two chief exercises of patience under adversity; one respecting God, and another respecting men.

Eccles. xi. 8.

Patience with respect to God, must, in the days of trouble, suppress the risings of a murmuring and rebellious spirit. It must appear in that calm resignation to the will of Heaven, which is expressed in those pious sentiments of ancient good men: *I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his eyes. Shall we receive good at the hand of*

of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also? This is loyalty to the great Governor of the universe. This is that reverence which so well becomes creatures who know they are dependent, and who must confess themselves to be sinful. Such a spirit is fitted to attract the favour of Heaven, and to bring the severe visitation sooner to a close. Whereas the stubborn and impatient, who submit not themselves to the decrees of the Most High, require to be humbled and subdued by a continuance of chastisement.

Patience in adversity, with respect to men, must appear by the composure and tranquillity of our behaviour. The loud complaint, the querulous temper, and fretful spirit, disgrace every character. They show a mind that is unmanned by misfortunes. We weaken thereby the sympathy of others; and estrange them from the offices of kindness and comfort. The exertions of pity will be feeble, when it is mingled with contempt. At the same time, by thus weakly yielding to adversity, we allow its weight to bear us

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down with double pressure. Patience, by preserving composure within, resists the impression which trouble makes from without. By leaving the mind open to every consolation, it naturally tends to alleviate our burden.——To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amidst all the shocks of the world, forms the highest honour of a man. Patience, on such occasions, rises to magnanimity. It shows a great and noble mind, which is able to rest on itself, on God, and a good conscience: which can enjoy itself amidst all evils; and would rather endure the greatest hardships, than submit to what was dishonourable, in order to obtain relief. This gives proof of a strength that is derived from Heaven. It is a beam of the immortal light, shining on the heart. Such patience is the most complete triumph of religion and virtue; and accordingly it has ever characterised those whose names have been transmitted with honour to posterity. It has ennobled the hero, the saint, and the martyr. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are*

2 Cor. v. 8, 9.

are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed

THUS I have traced Patience through several of its most important operations in different circumstances of life; under provocations; under disappointments; under restraints; under injuries; and under afflictions. We now see, that it is a virtue of universal use. No man, in any condition, can pass his days with tolerable comfort who has not learned to practise it. His prosperity will be continually disturbed; and his adversity will be clouded with double darkness. He will be uneasy and troublesome to all with whom he is connected; and will be more troublesome to himself than to any other.——Let me particularly advise those who wish to cultivate so necessary a virtue, to begin their cultivation of it, on occasions when small offences and provocations arise. It is a great, but common error to imagine, that we are at liberty to give loose reins to temper among the trivial

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trivial occurrences of life. No excuse for irritation and impatience can be worse, than what is taken from the person being inconsiderable, or the incident being slight, which threw us off our guard. With inconsiderable persons we are surrounded. Of slight incidents, the bulk of human life is composed. In the midst of these, the ruling temper of the mind is formed. It is only by moderation and self-command then acquired, that we can inure ourselves to patience, when the great conjunctures of life shall put it to a severer trial. If neglected then, we shall afterwards solicit its return in vain. *If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?*

Jer. xii. 5

In order to assist us in the acquisition of this grace, let us often contemplate that great model of it, which is displayed in the whole life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Whose

Whose temper was ever tried by more frequent provocations, more repeated disappointments, more flagrant injuries, or more severe distress? Yet, amidst them all, we behold him patiently enduring *the contradiction of sinners;* to their rudeness, opposing a mild and unruffled, though firm, spirit; and, in the cause of mankind, generously bearing with every indignity. Well might he say, *Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly in heart.* Having such a high example before our eyes, let us be ashamed of those sallies of impatience which we so often suffer to break forth in the midst of prosperity. By a more manly tranquillity and self-command, let us discover to the world, that, as men, and as Christians, we have learned *in patience to possess our souls.*

Matth. xi. 29.

SERMON XII.

On Moderation.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 5.

Let your Moderation be known unto all Men.

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THE present state of man is neither doomed to constant misery, nor designed for complete happiness. It is, in general, a mixed state, of comfort and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity; neither brightened by uninterrupted sun-shine, nor overcast with perpetual shade; but subject to alternate successions of the one, and the other. While such a state forbids despair, it also checks presumption. It is equally adverse to despondency of mind, and to high elevation of spirits. The temper which best suits, is expressed in

in the Text by *moderation;* which, as the habitual tenour of the soul, the apostle exhorts us to discover in our whole conduct; *let it be known unto all men.* This virtue consists in the equal balance of the soul. It imports such proper government of our passions and pleasures, as shall prevent us from running into extremes of any kind; and shall produce a calm and temperate frame of mind. It chiefly respects our conduct in that state which comes under the description of ease, or prosperity. Patience, of which I treated in the preceding Discourse, directs the proper regulation of the mind, under the disagreeable incidents of life. Moderation determines the bounds within which it should remain, when circumstances are agreeable or promising. What I now purpose is, to point out some of the chief instances in which Moderation ought to take place, and to show the importance of preserving it.

I. Moderation in our wishes. The active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous

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prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself, in every situation of fortune, straightened and confined. Sensible of deficiency in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, after something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence, that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence, that disgust of pleasures which they have tried; that passion for novelty; that ambition of rising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All which may be considered as indications of a certain native, original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present condition, and pointing at the higher objects for which it was made. Happy, if these latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss!

But, in this dark and bewildered state, the aspiring tendency of our nature unfortunately

fortunately takes an opposite direction, and feeds a very misplaced ambition. The flattering appearances which here present themselves to sense; the distinctions which fortune confers; the advantages and pleasures which we imagine the world to be capable of bestowing, fill up the ultimate wish of most men. These are the objects which engross their solitary musings, and stimulate their active labours; which warm the breast of the young, animate the industry of the middle-aged, and often keep alive the passions of the old, until the very close of life. Assuredly, there is nothing unlawful in our wishing to be freed from whatever is disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life. But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating us into much extravagance and folly. Desires and wishes are the first springs of action. When they become exorbitant, the whole character is likely to be tainted. If we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds of ideal happiness; if we feed our imagina-

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imagination with plans of opulence and splendour far beyond our rank; if we fix to our wishes certain stages of high advancement, or certain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, as the sole stations of felicity; the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state; unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties that belong to it; we shall discompose the peace and order of our minds, and foment many hurtful passions. Here, then, let Moderation begin its reign; by bringing within reasonable bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflections on the fallacious nature of those objects which the world hangs out to allure desire.

You have strayed, my friends, from the road which conducts to felicity; you have dishonoured the native dignity of your souls, in allowing your wishes to terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness or happiness. Your imagination roves in a land of shadows. Unreal

Unreal forms deceive you. It is no more than a phantom, an illusion of happiness which attracts your fond admiration; nay, an illusion of happiness which often conceals much real misery. Do you imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which your wishes aspire? Alas! how frequently has experience showed, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew? Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, royalty itself, would, many a time, have been gladly exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, with which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed that there should mix many deep shades of woe. On the elevated situations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly fall. There the storm spends its violence, and there the thunder breaks; while safe and unhurt the inhabitant of the vale remains below.—Retreat, then, from those vain and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire.

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Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable. Train your minds to moderate views of human life, and human happiness. Remember, and admire, the wisdom of Agur's wish. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* Let me recommend,

Proverbs, xxx. 8, 9.

II. Moderation in our pursuits. Wishes and desires rest within. If immoderate and improper, though they taint the heart, yet society may not be affected by them. The obscure and harmless individual may indulge his dreams, without disturbing the public peace. But when the active pursuits in which we engage rise beyond moderation, they fill the world with great disorders; often with flagrant crimes. This admonition chiefly respects the ambitious men of the world. I say not that all ambition is to be condemned;

demned; or that high pursuits ought, on every occasion, to be checked. Some men are formed by nature, for rising into conspicuous stations of life. In following the impulse of their minds, and properly exerting the talents with which God has blessed them, there is room for ambition to act in a laudable sphere, and to become the instrument of much public good. But this may safely be pronounced, that the bulk of men are ready to over-rate their own abilities, and to imagine themselves equal to higher things than they were ever designed for by nature. Be sober, therefore, in fixing your aims, and planning your destined pursuits. Beware of being led aside from the plain path of sound and moderate conduct, by those false lights which self-flattery is always ready to hang out. By aiming at a mark too high, you may fall short of what it was within your power to have reached. Instead of attaining to eminence, you may expose yourselves to derision; nay, may bring upon your heads manifold disasters. *I say to every man that is among you, not* Romans, xii. 3.

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to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.

Whatever your aims be, there is one exercise of moderation which must be enjoined to those of the greatest abilities, as well as to others; that is, never to transgress the bounds of moral duty. Amidst the warmth of pursuit, accustom yourselves to submit to the restraints, which religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, which regard to reputation and character, impose. Think not, that there are no barriers which ought to stop your progress. It is from a violent and impetuous spirit that all the evils spring, which are so often found to accompany ambition. Hence, in private life, the laws of truth and honour are violated. Hence, in public contests, the peace and welfare of nations have been so often sacrificed to the ambitious projects of the great. The man of moderation, as he is temperate in his wishes, so in his pursuits he is regulated by virtue. A good conscience is to him more valuable than any success. He is not so much bent on the accomplishment

ment of any design, as to take a dishonourable step, in order to compass it. He can have patience. He can brook disappointments. He can yield to unsurmountable obstacles; and, by gentle and gradual progress, is more likely to succeed in the end, than others are, by violence and impetuosity. In his highest enterprise, he wishes not to have the appearance of a meteor, which fires the atmosphere; or of a comet, which astonishes the public by its blazing, eccentric course; but rather to resemble those steady luminaries of heaven, which advance in their orbits with a silent and regular motion. He approves himself thereby to the virtuous, the wise, and discerning; and, by a temperate and unexceptionable conduct, escapes those dangers which persons of an opposite description are perpetually ready to incur.

III. Be moderate in your expectations. When your state is flourishing, and the course of events proceeds according to your wish, suffer not your minds to be

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vainly lifted up. Flatter not yourselves with high prospects of the increasing favours of the world, and the continuing applause of men. Say not within your hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. I shall never see adversity. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly.*—You are betraying yourselves; you are laying a sure foundation of disappointment and misery, when you allow your fancy to soar to such lofty pinnacles of confident hope. By building your house in this airy region, you are preparing for yourselves a great and cruel fall. Your *trust is the spider's web.* You *may lean on your house; but it shall not stand. You may hold it fast; but it shall not endure.* For, to man on earth it was never granted, to gratify all his hopes; or to persevere in one tract of uninterrupted prosperity. Unpleasing vicissitudes never fail to succeed those that were grateful. *The fashion of the world*, how gay or smiling soever, *passeth*, and often passeth suddenly, *away.*

By

By want of moderation in our hopes, we not only increase dejection when disappointment comes, but we accelerate disappointment; we bring forward, with greater speed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the natural consequence of presumptuous expectation, is rashness in conduct. He who indulges confident security, of course neglects due precautions against the dangers that threaten him; and his fall will be foreseen and predicted. He not only exposes himself unguarded to dangers, but he multiplies them against himself. By presumption and vanity, he either provokes enmity, or incurs contempt.

The arrogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally contrary to religion, and to prudence. The world cannot bear such a spirit; and Providence seldom fails to check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure those who, intoxicated with prosperity, forget their dependence on that Supreme Power which raised them up. His awful government of the world

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has been in nothing more conspicuous than in *bringing low the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud in the imaginations of their minds.—Is not this the great Babylon which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my Majesty?* Thus exclaimed the presumptuous monarch in the pride of his heart. But, lo! when the word was yet in his mouth, the visitation from Heaven came, and the voice was heard; *O, Nebuchadnezzar! to thee it is spoken; thy kingdom is departed from thee.—He that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.* A temperate spirit, and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind in this uncertain and changing state. They enable us to pass through life with most comfort. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation; and if we must fall, they render our fall the lighter.

Daniel, iv. 30, 31.

Luke, xiv. 11.

IV. Moderation in our pleasures is an important exercise of the virtue which we

we are now considering. It is an invariable law of our present condition, that every pleasure which is pursued to excess, converts itself into poison. What was intended for the cordial and refreshment of human life, through want of moderation, we turn to its bane. In all the pleasures of sense, it is apparent, that only when indulged within certain limits, they confer satisfaction. No sooner do we pass the line which temperance has drawn, than pernicious effects come forward and show themselves. Could I lay open to your view the monuments of death, they would read a lecture in favour of moderation, much more powerful than any that the most eloquent preacher can give. You would behold the graves peopled with the victims of intemperance. You would behold those chambers of darkness hung round, on every side, with the trophies of luxury, drunkenness, and sensuality. So numerous would you find those martyrs of iniquity, that it may safely be asserted, where war or pestilence have slain their thousands,

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thousands, intemperate pleasure has slain its ten thousands.

While the want of moderation in pleasure brings men to an untimely grave, at the same time, until they arrive there, it pursues and afflicts them with evils innumerable. To what cause so much as to this, are owing, faded youth, and premature old age; an enervated body, and an enfeebled mind; together with all that long train of diseases, which the indulgence of appetite and sense have introduced into the world? Health, cheerfulness, and vigour, are known to be the offspring of temperance. The man of moderation brings to all the natural and innocent pleasures of life, that sound, uncorrupted relish, which gives him a much fuller enjoyment of them, than the palled and vitiated appetite of the voluptuary allows him to know. He culls the flower of every allowable gratification, without dwelling upon it until the flavour be lost. He tastes the sweet of every pleasure, without pursuing it till the bitter dregs rise.

rise. Whereas the man of opposite character dips so deep, that he never fails to stir an impure and noxious sediment, which lies at the bottom of the cup.—— In the pleasures, besides, which are regulated by moderation, there is always that dignity which goes along with innocence. No man needs to be ashamed of them. They are consistent with honour; with the favour of God, and of man. But the sensualist, who disdains all restraint in his pleasures, is odious in the public eye. His vices become gross; his character contemptible; and he ends in being a burden both to himself and to society. Let me exhort you once more,

V. To moderation in all your passions. This exercise of the virtue is the more requisite, because there is no passion in human nature but what has, of itself, a tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of mind. Of course, it is apt to derange the regular course of our ideas; and to produce confusion within. Nothing, at the same time,

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time, is more seducing than passion. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies, to our apprehension, the tumult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to its aid. Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world; and hardly accounted a man of sound mind. But, what is less apt to be attended to, some even of those passions which are reckoned innocent, or whose tendency to disorder and evil is not apparent, stand, nevertheless, in need of moderation and restrainst, as well as others. For such is the feebleness of our nature, that every passion which has for its object any worldly good, is in hazard of attaching us too strongly, and of transporting us beyond the bounds of reason. If allowed to acquire the full and unrestrained dominion of the heart, it is sufficient, in various situations, to render us miserable;

miserable; and almost in every situation, by its ingrossing power, to render us negligent of duties which, as men or Christians, we are bound to perform.

Of the insidious growth of passion, therefore, we have great reason to beware. We ought always to have at hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering its warmth, and in regaining possession of our souls. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion; that nothing truly is, what it then seems to be; that all the opinions which we then form, are erroneous; and all the judgments which we pass, are extravagant. Let moderation accustom us to wait until the fumes of passsion be spent; until the mist which it has raised begin to be dissipated. We shall then be able to see where truth and right lie; and reason shall, by degrees, resume the ascendant. On no occasion let us imagine, that strength of mind is shown by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men, but the impetuosity of children. It is the strength of one who is in the delirium of a fever,

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fever, or under the disease of madness. The strength of such a person is indeed increased. But it is an unnatural strength; which, being under no proper guidance, is directed towards objects that occasion his destruction. True strength of mind is shown in governing and resisting passion, not in giving it scope; in restraining the wild beast within; and acting, on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Thus I have pointed out, in several instances, how moderation ought to be displayed: moderation in our wishes; moderation in our pursuits; moderation in our hopes; moderation in our pleasures; moderation in our passions. It is a principle which should habitually influence our conduct, and form the reigning temperature of the soul.

The great motive to this virtue is suggested by the words immediately following the Text; *the Lord is at hand.* The Judge

is

is coming, who is to close this temporary scene of things, and to introduce a higher state of existence. The day is at hand, which will place the great concerns of men in a point of view very different from that in which they are at present beheld; will strip the world of its false glory; will detect the vanity of earthly pursuits; and disclose objects which have the proper title to interest a rational mind. Objects acquire power to engage our passions, only in proportion as they are conceived to be great. But great, or little, are no more than terms of comparison. Those things which appear great to one who knows nothing greater, will sink into a diminutive size, when he becomes acquainted with objects of a higher nature. Were it oftener in our thoughts, that *the Lord is at hand*, none of those things which now discompose and agitate worldly men would appear of sufficient magnitude to raise commotion in our breasts. Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth

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birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men and Christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason why they who believe *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their *moderation* appear, and be *known unto all men.*

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On the Joy, and the Bitterness of the Heart.

PROVERBS, xiv. 10.

The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

IT is well known, that men have always been much inclined to place their happiness in the advantages of fortune, and the distinctions of rank. Hence these have been pursued by the multitude with such avidity, that every principle of honour, probity, and virtue, have been sacrificed to the attainment of them. At the same time, many circumstances might have convinced men, that supposing them to be successful in the pursuit, it by no means followed, that happiness was to be the re-

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ward. For if happiness be, in truth, essentially connected with splendid fortune, or exalted rank, how comes it to pass, that many, in the inferiour stations of life, visibly spend their days with more comfort, than they who occupy the higher departments of the world? Why does the beggar sing, while the king is sad? A small measure of reflection on our nature might satisfy us, that there are other principles of happiness or misery, too often overlooked by the world, which immediately affect the heart, and operate there with a greater force and power than any circumstances of rank or fortune. This is the observation of the wise man in the Text; and what I now purpose to illustrate. I shall take a view of the chief sources of that *bitterness which the heart knoweth*, and of that *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle;* and then shall point out the proper improvements to be made of the subject.

If we inquire carefully into the sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart, we shall

shall find that they are chiefly two: that they arise either from a man's own mind and temper; or, from the connection in which he stands with some of his fellow-creatures. In other words, the circumstances which most essentially affect every man's happiness are, his personal character, and his social feelings.

I. EVERY man's own mind and temper is, necessarily, to himself a source of much inward joy or bitterness. For every man, if we may be allowed the expression, is more connected with himself, than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts; and what he meets with there, must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness, or his disquiet. Whatever his condition in the world be, whether high or low, if he find no cause to upbraid himself for his behaviour; if he be satisfied that his conduct proceeds upon a rational plan; if, amidst the failings incident to humanity, his conscience be, in the main, free from reproach, and his mind undisturbed by

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any dismal presages of futurity; the foundation is laid for a placid and agreeable tenour of life. If to this you add a calm and cheerful temper, not easily fretted or disturbed, not subject to envy, nor prone to violent passion, much of that joy will be produced, which, it is said in the Text, *a stranger intermeddleth not with.* For this is an intrinsic joy, independent of all foreign causes. *The upright man,* as it is written, *is satisfied from himself.* Undisturbed by the vexations of folly, or the remorse of guilt, his nights will be peaceful, and his days serene. His mind is a kingdom to itself. A good conscience, and good temper, prepare, even in the midst of poverty, *a continual feast.*

But how sadly will the scene be reversed, if the first thoughts which occur to a man concerning himself, shall be of a gloomy and threatening kind; if his temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation! In any situation of fortune, is it possible for him to be happy, whose mind is in this troubled

bled state? *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?* Vigour of mind may enable a man to sustain many shocks of adversity. In his spirit, as long as it is sound, he can find a resource, when other auxiliaries fail. But if that which should sustain him be enfeebled and broken; if that to which he has recourse for the cure of other sorrows, become itself the wounded part; to what quarter can he turn for relief?

The wounds which the spirit suffers are owing chiefly to three causes: to folly, to passion, or to guilt. They frequently originate from folly; that is, from vain and improper pursuits, which, though not directly criminal, are unsuitable to a man's age, character, or condition, in the world. In consequence of these, he beholds himself degraded and exposed; and suffers the pain of many a mortifying reflection, and many a humbling comparison of himself with others. The distress occasioned by a sense of folly, is aggravated by any violent passion being allowed to take pos-

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session of the heart. Even though it be of the class of those which are reckoned innocent, yet if it have entirely seized and overpowered a man, it destroys his tranquillity, and brings his mind into a perturbed state. But if it be a passion of the black and vicious kind, it is sufficient to blast the most flourishing condition, and to poison all his joys. If to those wounds inflicted by folly, or by passion, you add the wound of guilt, the remorse and fear produced by criminal deeds, you fill up the measure of pain and bitterness of heart. Often have the terrors of conscience occasioned inward paroxysms, or violent agitations of mind. A dark and threatening cloud seems, to the conscious sinner, to be hanging over his head. He who believes himself despised, or hated, by men, and who dreads at the same time an avenging God, can derive little pleasure from the external comforts of life. The bitterness of his heart infuses itself into every draught which pleasure offers to his lips.

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The external misfortunes of life, disappointments, poverty, and sickness, are nothing in comparison of those inward distresses of mind, occasioned by folly, by passion, and by guilt. They may indeed prevail in different degrees, according as one or other of those principles of bitterness is predominant. But they are seldom parted far asunder from one another; and when, as it too often happens, all the three are complicated, they complete the misery of man. The disorders of the mind, having then arisen to their height, become of all things the most dreadful. The shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse of guilt, acting in conjunction, have too frequently driven men to the last and abhorred refuge, of seeking relief in death from a life too embittered to be any longer endured. I proceed to consider,

II. Other troubles and other joys of the heart, arising from sources different from those that I have now described; founded in the relations or connections

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which we have with others, and springing from the feelings which these occasion. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an external nature. Religion does not teach that all the sources of inward pleasure or pain are derived from our temper and moral behaviour. These are indeed the principal springs of bitterness or joy. In one way or other, they affect all the pleasures and pains of life; but they include not, within themselves, the whole of them. Our Creator did not intend, that the happiness of each individual should have no dependence on those who are around him. Having connected us in society by many ties, it is his decree, that these ties should prove, both during their subsistence and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain, immediately, and often deeply, affecting the human heart. My doctrine, therefore, is not, that *the bitterness which the heart knoweth as its own*, and *the joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not*, is independent of every thing external. What I assert is, that this *bitterness* and this *joy* depend much more

more on other causes, than on riches or poverty, on high or low stations in the world; that, equally in the conditions of elevated fortune and of private life, the most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connections we have with others.

In order to make this appear, let us suppose a man in any rank or condition of life, happy in his family and his friends; soothed by the cordial intercourse of kind affections, which he partakes with them; enjoying the comfort of doing them good offices, and receiving in return their sincerest gratitude; experiencing no jealousy nor envy, no disquiet or alienation of affection, among those with whom he is connected;——how many, and how copious sources of inward joy open to such a man! How smooth is the tenour of a life that proceeds in such a course! What a smiling aspect does the love of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of friends

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friends and relations, give to every surrounding object, and every returning day! With what a lustre does it gild even the small habitation where such placid intercourse dwells; where such scenes of heart-felt satisfaction succeed uninterruptedly to one another!

But let us suppose this joyful intercourse to be broken off, in an untimely hour, by the cruel hand of the last foe; let us imagine the family, once so happy among themselves, to behold the parent, the child, or the spouse, to whom their hearts were attached by the tenderest ties, stretched on the cold bed of death; then, what bitterness does the heart know! This, in the strictest sense, is its *own bitterness;* from which it is not in the power of any external circumstance whatever to afford it relief. Amidst those piercing griefs of the heart, all ranks of life are levelled; all distinctions of fortune are forgotten. Unavailing are the trophies of splendid woe, with which riches deck the fatal couch, to give the least comfort to the mourner. The prince, and the peasant,

sant, then equally feel their own bitterness. Dwelling on the melancholy remembrance of joys that are past and gone, the one forgets his poverty, the other despises the gilded trappings of his state; both, in that sad hour, are fully sensible, that on the favours of fortune it depends not to make man happy in this world.

But it is not only the death of friends, which, in the midst of a seemingly prosperous state, is able to bring distress home to the heart. From various failures in their conduct when living, arises much of the inward uneasiness we suffer. It will, in general, be found, that the behaviour of those among whom we live in near connection, is, next to personal character and temper, the chief source, either of the pleasures, or of the disquietudes, of every man's life. As when their behaviour is cordial and satisfactory, it is of all external things the most soothing to the mind; so, on the other hand, their levity, their inattention, or occasional harshness, even though it proceed to no decided breach of friendship, yet ruffles and frets the

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the temper. Social life, harassed with those petty vexations, resembles a road which a man is doomed daily to travel; but finds it rugged, and stony, and painful to be trod.

The case becomes much worse, if the base and criminal conduct of persons whom we have once loved, dissolve all the bonds of amity, and show that our confidence has been abused. Then are opened some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart.——Behold the heart of the parent, torn by the unworthy behaviour and cruel ingratitude of the child, whom he had trained up with the fondest hopes; on whom he had lavished his whole affection; and for whose sake he had laboured and toiled, through the course of a long life. Behold the endearments of the conjugal state changed into black suspicion, and mistrust; the affectionate spouse, or the virtuous husband, left to mourn, with a broken heart, the infidelity of the once-beloved partner of their life. Behold the unsuspecting friend betrayed, in the hour of danger, by the

the friend in whom he trusted; or, in the midst of the severe misfortune, meeting nothing but cold indifference, perhaps scorn and contempt, where he had expected to find the kindest sympathy.—— Are these, let me ask, uncommon scenes in the world? Are such distresses peculiar to any rank or station? Do they chiefly befal persons in humble life, and have the great any prerogative which affords them exemption? When the heart is sorely wounded by the ingratitude or faithlessness of those on whom it had leaned with the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief? Will it find comfort in the recollection of honours and titles, or in the contemplation of surrounding treasures?——Talk not of the honours of a court. Talk not of the wealth of the east. These, in the hours of heart-bitterness, are spurned, as contemptible and vile; perhaps cursed, as indirect causes of the present distress. The dart has made its way to the heart. There, there it is fixed. The very seat of feeling is assailed; and in proportion to the sensibility

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bility of the sufferer's heart, and the tenderness of his affections, such, unfortunately, will be his degree of anguish. A good conscience, and hope in God, may indeed bring him consolation. But under such distresses of the heart as I have described, fortune, be it as flourishing as you will, is no more than an empty pageant. It is a feeble reed, which affords no support. It is a house of straw, which is scattered before the wind.

THUS you see this doctrine meeting us, from many quarters, that the heart knows a bitterness and joy of its own, altogether distinct from the uneasiness or the pleasure that is produced by the circumstances of external fortune; arising either from personal character, and the state of a man's own mind; or from the affections excited by the relations in which he stands to others. This joy and this bitterness are, each of them, of so much greater consequence than any distinctions of fortune, that, blessed with the former, one may be happy, as far as human happiness goes, in a cottage;

a cottage; and afflicted with the latter, he must be miserable in a palace.——Let us now proceed to an important part of the subject, the practical improvement to which this doctrine leads.

First, Let it serve to moderate our passion for riches, and high situations in the world. It is well known, that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Hence, among the middle and lower ranks of men, all the fraud, falsehood, and treachery, with which the competition for gain infests society. Hence, in the higher stations of the world, all the atrocious crimes flowing from ambition, and the love of power, by which the peace of mankind has so often been broken, and the earth stained with blood. Had these coveted advantages the power, when obtained, of ensuring joy to the heart, and rendering it a stranger to bitterness, some apology might be offered for the violence to which they have given occasion. The prize might be supposed worthy of being acquired

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acquired at a high expence, when so much depended on the attainment. But I have shown, I hope with satisfactory evidence, that the contrary is the truth. I say not, that the advantages of fortune deserve no regard from a wise or a good man. Poverty is always distressing. Opulence and rank are both attended with many comforts, and may be rendered subservient to the most valuable purposes. But what I say is, that it is a great error to rate them beyond their just value. Secondary advantages, inferiour assistances to felicity, they are; and no more. They rank below every thing that immediately affects the heart, and that is a native source of joy or bitterness there. If a man be either unhappy in his dispositions, or unhappy in all his connections, you heap upon him, in vain, all the treasures, and all the honours, which kings can bestow. Divest these things, then, of that false glare which the opinions of the multitude throw around them. Contemplate them with a more impartial eye. Pursue them with less eagerness. Above all, never sacrifice to the pursuit

suit any degree of probity or moral worth, of candour or good affection; if you would not lay a foundation for that bitterness of heart, which none of the goods of fortune can either compensate or cure.

SECONDLY, Let the observations which have been made, correct our mistakes, and check our complaints, concerning a supposed promiscuous distribution of happiness in this world. The charge of injustice, which so often, on this account, hath been brought against Providence, rests entirely on this ground, that the happiness and misery of men may be estimated by the degree of their external prosperity. This is the delusion under which the multitude have always laboured; but which a just consideration of the invisible springs of happiness that affect the heart, is sufficient to correct. If you would judge whether a man be really happy, it is not solely to his houses and his lands, to his equipage and his retinue, you are to look. Unless you could see farther,

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and discern what joy, or what bitterness, his heart feels, you can pronounce nothing concerning him. That proud and wicked man whom you behold surrounded with state and splendour, and upon whom you think the favours of Heaven so improperly lavished, may be a wretch, pining away in secret, with a thousand griefs unknown to the world. That poor man, who appears neglected and overlooked, may, in his humble station, be partaking of all the moral, and all the social joys, that exhilarate the heart; may be living cheerful, contented, and happy. Cease then to murmur against dispensations of Providence, which are, to us, so imperfectly known. Envy not the prosperity of sinners. Judge not of the real condition of men, from what floats merely on the surface of their state. Let us rather,

THIRDLY, Turn our attention to those internal sources of happiness or misery, on which it hath been shown that so much depends. As far as the bitterness or joy

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of the heart arises from the first of those great springs which I assigned to it, our own conduct and temper, so far our happiness is placed, in some measure, in our own hands. What is amiss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, of passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care, under the assistance of Divine grace. He who thereby attains to a tranquil and composed state of heart, free from ill-humour and disgust, from violent passions, and from vexing remorse, is laying a foundation for enjoyment of himself, much surer and broader than if he were amassing thousands to increase his estate.

With regard to the other spring of joy or bitterness of heart, arising from our connections with others, here, indeed, we are more dependent on things not within our power. These connections are not always of our own forming; and even when they have been formed by choice, the wisest are liable to be disappointed in their expectations. Yet here too it will be found, that the proper regulation of

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the heart is of the utmost importance, both for improving the joys which our situation affords, and for mitigating the griefs which our connections may render unavoidable. As far as the choice of friends or relatives depends on ourselves, let their virtue and worth ever direct that choice, if we look for any lasting felicity from it. In all the habits and attachments of social life, after they are formed, let it be our study, to fulfil properly our own part. Let nothing be wanting on our side, to nourish that mutual harmony and affectionate friendship which, in every situation of life, as has been shown, is of so great consequence to our peace and satisfaction. It is not, indeed, in our power to preserve always alive those friends, in whom our hearts delight. It is often not in our power to prevent the ingratitude and unworthy behaviour of other friends, from whom we once expected comfort. But under those afflicting incidents of life, much may be done by proper employment of the thoughts, and direction of the

the affections, for obtaining relief. To a purified and well-regulated heart, reason and religion can bring many aids for healing its wounds, and restoring its peace; aids which, to the negligent and vicious, are wholly unknown. The greater experience we have of the vicissitudes of human life, with more weight will that precept of the wise man always come home to our remembrance; *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*——Hence arises,

Proverbs, iv. 23.

In the fourth and last place, another instruction, that is of the utmost importance to us all, frequently to look up to Him who made the human heart; and to implore his assistance in the regulation and government of it. Known to Him are all the sources of bitterness and joy by which it is affected. On Him it depends, to let them forth, or to shut them up; to increase, or to diminish them, at his pleasure. In a study so infinitely important to happiness, as that of the pre-

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servation of inward peace, we cannot be too earnest in beseeching aid from the great Father of Spirits, to enable us to keep our hearts free from distress and trouble.——Besides the assistance which we may hope to derive from Divine grace, the employments of devotion themselves form one of the most powerful means of composing and tranquillising the heart. On various occasions, when the sources of heart-bitterness have been most overflowing, devotion has been found the only refuge of the sufferer. Devotion opens a sanctuary, to which they whose hearts have been most deeply wounded, can always fly. Within that quiet and sacred retreat, they have often found a healing balsam prepared. When grieved by men, they have derived, from the ascent of the mind towards God and celestial objects, much to sooth them at present, and much to hope for in future. Let us, therefore, neglect no mean with which religion can furnish us, for promoting the joys, and assuaging the bitterness, of the heart.

Amidst

Amidst the frailties of our nature, the inconstancy of men, and the frequent changes of human life, we shall find every assistance that can be procured, little enough, for enabling us to pass our few days with tolerable comfort and peace.

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On Characters of Imperfect Goodness.

MARK, x. 21.

Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.—

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THE characters of men which the world presents to us are infinitely diversified. In some, either the good or the bad qualities are so predominant, as strongly to mark the character; to discriminate one person as a virtuous, another as a vicious man. In others, these qualities are so mixed together, as to leave the character doubtful. The light and the shade are so much blended, the colours of virtue and vice run in such a manner into one another, that we can hardly distinguish where the one ends, and the other begins; and we

we remain in suspense whether to blame or to praise. While we admire those who are thoroughly good, and detest the grossly wicked, it is proper also to bestow attention on those imperfect characters, where there may be much to praise, and somewhat to blame; and where regard to the commendable part shall not hinder us from remarking what is defective or faulty. Such attentions will be found the more useful, as characters of this mixed sort are, more frequently than any other, exhibited to us in the commerce of society.

It was one of this sort, which gave occasion to the incident recorded in the Text. The incident seems to have been considered as remarkable, since it is recounted by three of the evangelical writers; and by them all, with nearly the same circumstances. The person to whom the history relates was *a ruler;* one of higher rank and station than those who usually resorted to Jesus. He was *a rich man:* He was *a young man.* His whole behaviour was prepossessing and engaging. He appears to have conceived a high opinion

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opinion of our Lord. He addressed him with the utmost respect; and the question which he put to him was proper and important. *He kneeled to him, and said, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* His conduct in the world had been regular and decent. He could protest, that he had hitherto kept himself free from any gross vice; and, in his dealings with others, had observed the precepts of God. Our Lord, *beholding him*, is said to have *loved him;* whence we have reason to conclude, that he was not hypocritical in his professions; and that his countenance carried the expression of good dispositions, as his speech and his manners were altogether complacent and gentle. Yet this person, amiable as he was, when his virtue was put to the test, disappointed the hopes which he had given reason to form. Attached, in all probability, to the indulgence of ease and pleasure, he wanted fortitude of mind to part with the advantages of the world, for the sake of religion. When our Lord required him to fulfil his good intentions,

by

by relinquishing his fortune, becoming one of his followers, and preparing himself to encounter sufferings, the sacrifice appeared to him too great. Impressions of virtue, however, still remained on his mind. He was sensible of what he ought to have done; and regretted his want of courage to do it. He *was sorrowful:* He *was grieved:* Yet *he went away.*

Persons of a character somewhat resembling this, all of us may have met with; especially among the young; among those who have been liberally educated, and polished by a good society. They abhor open vice, and crimes that disturb the world. They have a respect for religion. They are willing to receive instruction for their conduct. They are modest and unassuming; respectful to their superiours in age or station; gentle in their address; inoffensive and courteous in their whole behaviour. They are fond of obliging every one; unwilling to hurt or displease any.—Such persons we cannot but love. We gladly promise well of them;

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them; and are disposed to forward and assist them: Yet such is the weakness of our nature, that at the bottom of this character there may lie, as we see exemplified in the instance before us, some secret and material defects. That vigour of mind, that firmness of principle, may be wanting, which is requisite for enabling them to act with propriety, when their virtue is put to a decisive trial. The softness of their nature is unfavourable to a steady perseverance in the course of integrity. They possess the amiable qualities; but there is ground to suspect, that in the estimable ones they are deficient. While, therefore, we by no means class them among the bad, we dare not give them the full praise of virtue. When they set out in the world, we cannot pronounce with confidence, what confirmed features their character will assume; nor how far they can be depended upon in future life. Allow me now to point out the dangers which such persons are most likely to incur; and to show what is requisite for them farther to study, in order to their fulfilling

fulfilling the part of good men and true Christians.

I. PERSONS of this description are not qualified for discharging aright many duties, to which their situation in life may call them. In certain circumstances, they behave with abundance of propriety. When all is calm and smooth around them; when nothing occurs to agitate the mind, or to disturb the tenour of placid life, none of their defects come forward. They are beloved; and they are useful. They promote the comfort of human society; and, by gentleness and courtesy of manners, serve to cement men together in agreeable union. But to sail on the tranquil surface of an unruffled lake, and to steer a safe course through a troubled and stormy ocean, require different talents; and, alas! human life oftener resembles the stormy ocean, than the unruffled lake. We shall not have been long embarked, without finding the resemblance to hold too closely.

Amidst the bustle of the world, amidst the open contentions and secret enmities which

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which prevail in every society, mildness and gentleness alone are not sufficient to carry us with honour through the duties of our different stations; as heads of families, citizens, subjects, magistrates, or as engaged in the pursuits of our several callings. Disturbances and trials arise, which demand vigorous exertions of all the moral powers; of patience, vigilance, and self-denial; of constancy and fortitude, to support us under danger and reproach; of temperance, to restrain us from being carried away by pleasure; of firm and determined principle, to make us despise the bribes of sin. These manly dispositions of mind are indispensably necessary to prepare one for surmounting the discouragements of virtue, and for struggling honourably through the hardships of life. Unless he be thus armed and fortified, whatever good intentions have been in his heart, they are likely to be frustrated in action. Nothing that is great, can be undertaken. Nothing that is difficult or hazardous, can be accomplished. Nor are we to imagine, that it is only in times of persecution, or war, or civil commotions,

tions, that there is occasion for those stonger efforts, those masculine virtues of the soul, to be displayed. The private, and seemingly quiet, stations of life, often call men forth, in the days of peace, to severe trial of firmness and constancy. The life of very few proceeds in so uniform a train, as not to oblige them to discover, in some situation or other, what portion they possess of the estimable qualities of man. Hence it sometimes happens, that persons whose manners were much less promising and engaging than those of others, have, nevertheless, when brought to act a part in critical circumstances, performed that part with more unsullied honour, and firmer integrity, than they.

II. Persons of the character I have described are ill-fitted, not only for discharging the higher duties of life, but also for resisting the common temptations to vice. With good dispositions in their mind, with a desire, like the young ruler in the Text, to know what they shall do in order *to inherit eternal life;* yet, when the

terms

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terms required of them interfere with any favourite enjoyment, like him, they *are sorrowful, and go away.* The particular trial to which he was put, may appear to be a hard one, and to exceed the ordinary rate of virtue. Our Lord, who discerned his heart, saw it to be necessary, in his case, for bringing his character to the test. But in cases, where trials of much less difficulty present themselves, they who partake of a character similar to his, are often found to give way. The good qualities which they possess, border on certain weaknesses of the mind; and these weaknesses are apt to betray them insensibly into vices, with which they are connected.

Good-nature, for instance, is in danger of running into that unlimited complaisance, which assimilates men to the loose manners of those whom they find around them. Pliant, and yielding in their temper, they have not force to stand by the decisions of their own minds, with regard to right and wrong. Like the animal which is said to assume the colour of every

every object to which it is applied, they lose all proper character of their own; and are formed by the characters of those with whom they chance to associate. The mild are apt to sink into habits of indolence and sloth. The cheerful and gay, when warmed by pleasure and mirth, lose that sobriety and self-denial, which is essential to the support of virtue.—— Even modesty and submission, qualities so valuable in themselves, and so highly ornamental to youth, sometimes degenerate into a vicious timidity; a timidity which restrains men from doing their duty with firmness; which cannot stand the frown of the great, the reproach of the multitude, or even the ridicule and sneer of the scorner.

Nothing can be more amiable than a constant desire to please, and an unwillingness to offend or hurt. Yet, in characters where this is a predominant feature, defects are often found. Fond always to oblige, and afraid to utter any disagreeable truth, such persons are sometimes led to dissemble. Their love of truth is sacri-

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ficed to their love of pleasing. Their speech, and their manners, assume a studied courtesy. You cannot always depend on their smile; nor, when they promise, be sure of the performance. They mean and intend well; but the good intention is temporary. Like wax, they yield easily to every impression; and the transient friendship contracted with one person, is effaced by the next. Undistinguishing desire to oblige, often proves, in the present state of human things, a dangerous habit. They who cannot, on many occasions, give a firm and steady denial, or who cannot break off a connection, which has been hastily and improperly formed, stand on the brink of many mischiefs. They will be seduced by the corrupting, ensnared by the artful, betrayed by those in whom they had placed their trust. Unsuspicious themselves, they were flattered with the belief of having many friends around them. Elated with sanguine hopes, and cheerful spirits, they reckoned, that *to-morrow would be as this day, and more abundant.* Injudicious liberality,

berality, and thoughtless profusion, are the consequence; until, in the end, the straits to which they are reduced, bring them into mean or dishonourable courses. Through innocent, but unguarded weakness, and from want of the severer virtues, they are, in process of time, betrayed into downright crimes. Such may be the conclusion of those, who, like the young ruler before us, with many amiable and promising dispositions, had begun their career in life.

III. Such persons are not prepared for sustaining, with propriety and dignity, the distresses to which our state is liable. They were equipped for the season of sunshine and serenity; but when the sky is overcast, and the days of darkness come, their feeble minds are destitute of shelter, and ill-provided for defence. Then is the time, when more hardy qualities are required; when courage must face danger, constancy support pain, patience possess itself in the midst of discouragements, magnanimity display its contempt of threat-

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enings. If those high virtues be altogether strangers to the mind, the mild and gentle will certainly sink under the torrent of disasters.—The ruler in the Text could plead, that his behaviour to others, in the course of social life, had been unexceptionable. So far, the reflection on his conduct would afford him comfort amidst adversity. But no man is without failings. In the dejecting season of trouble it will occur to every one, that he has been guilty of frequent transgression; that much of what ought to have been done, was neglected; and that much of what has been done, had better have been omitted. In such situations, when a thousand apprehensions arise to alarm conscience, nothing is able to quiet its uneasiness, except a well-grounded trust in the mercy and acceptance of Heaven. It is firm religious principle, acting upon a manly and enlightened mind, that gives dignity to the character, and composure to the heart, under all the troubles of the world. This enables the brave and virtuous man with success to buffet the storm.

storm. While he, who had once sparkled in society with all the charms of gay vivacity, and had been the delight of every circle in which he was engaged, remains dispirited, overwhelmed, and annihilated, in the evil day.

Such are the failings incident to persons of mixed and imperfect goodness; such the defects of a character formed merely of the amiable, without the estimable qualities of man.

It appears from this, that we must not place too much trust in the fair appearances, which a character may at first exhibit. In judging of others, let us always think the best, and employ the spirit of charity and candour. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be more severe. Let us remember him whom our Lord beheld, and *loved*; and who yet fell short of the kingdom of heaven. Let us not forget, that something more than gentleness and modesty, than complacency of temper and affability of manners, is requisite to form a worthy man, or a true Christian.

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To a high place in our esteem, these qualities are justly entitled. They enter essentially into every good man's character. They form some of its most favourable distinctions. But they constitute a part of it; not the whole. Let us not, therefore, rest on them entirely, when we conceive an idea of what manner of persons we ought to be.

Let piety form the basis of firm and established virtue. If this be wanting, the character cannot be sound and entire. Moral virtue will always be endangered, often be overthrown, when it is separated from its surest support. Confidence in God, strengthened by faith in the great Redeemer of mankind, not only amidst the severer trials of virtue, gives constancy to the mind; but, by nourishing the hope of immortality, adds warmth and elevation to the affections. They whose conduct is not animated by religious principle, are deprived of the most powerful incentive to worthy and honourable deeds.

Let

Let such discipline, next, be studied, as may form us to the active and manly virtues. To natural good affections, we can never entirely trust our conduct. These, as has been shown, may sometimes be warped into what is wrong; and often will prove insufficient for carrying us rightly through all the duties of life. Good affections are highly valuable; but they must be supported by fixed principles, cultivated in the understanding, and rooted in the heart. Habits must be acquired of temperance and self-denial, that we may be able to resist pleasure, and endure pain, when either of them interfere with our duty; that we may be prepared to make a sacrifice of any worldly interest, when the voice of God and conscience demand it. Let us always remember, that without fortitude of mind there is no manhood; there can be no perseverance in virtue. Let a sacred and inviolable regard for truth reign in our whole behaviour. Let us be distinguished for fidelity to every promise we have made; and for constancy in every worthy

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friendship we have formed. Let no weak complaisance, no undue regard to the opinions of men, ever make us betray the rights of conscience. What we have once, upon due consideration, adopted as rules of conduct, to these let us adhere unshaken. However the world may change around us, let it find us the same in prosperity and adversity; faithful to God and virtue; faithful to the convictions of our own heart. What our lot in the world may be, is not ours to foresee or determine. But it is ours to resolve, that, whatever it shall be, it shall find us persevering in one line of uprightness and honour.

By such discipline, such attentions as these, we are to guard against those failings, which are sometimes found to stain the most engaging characters. Joining in proper union the amiable and the estimable qualities, by the one we shall attract the good; and by the other, command respect from the bad. We shall both secure our own integrity, and shall exhibit

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to others a proper view of what virtue is, in its native grace and majesty. In one part of our character, we shall resemble the flower that smiles in spring; in another, the firmly rooted tree, that braves the winter storm. For, remember we must, that there is a season of winter, as well as of spring and summer, in human life; and it concerns us to be equally prepared for both.

A HIGHER and more perfect example of such a character as I now recommend, cannot be found, than what is presented to us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him we behold all that is gentle, united with all that is respectable. It is a remarkable expression, which the Apostle Paul employs concerning him; *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.* Well might these qualities be singled out, as those for which he was known and distinguished. We see him in his whole behaviour affable, courteous, and easy of access. He conversed familiarly with all who presented themselves; and despised not

2 Cor. x. 1.

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not the meanest. With all the infirmities of his disciples he calmly bore; and his rebukes were mild, when their provocations were great. He wept over the calamities of his country, which persecuted him; and apologised and prayed for them who put him to death. Yet the same Jesus we behold, awful in the strictness of his virtue; inflexible in the cause of truth; uncomplying with prevailing manners, when he found them corrupt; setting his face boldly against the hypocritical leaders of the people; overawed by none of their threatenings; in the most indignant terms reproving their vices, and stigmatising their characters. We behold him gentle, without being tame; firm, without being stern; courageous, without being violent. *Let this mind be in us which was also in Jesus Christ;* and we shall attain to honour, both with God and with man

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On the SACRAMENT of the LORD'S SUPPER, as a PREPARATION for DEATH.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

MATTHEW, xxvi. 29.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

WITH these words of our Blessed Lord, the Evangelist concludes his account of the institution of the Sacrament of the Supper. It is an institution which, solemn and venerable in itself, is rendered still more so by the circumstances which accompanied it. Our Lord had now, for about

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about three years, continued to appear in his public character in the land of Judea. He had, all along, been watched with a jealous eye by his enemies; and the time was come when they were to prevail against him. A few friends he had, from the beginning, selected, who, in every vicissitude of his state, remained faithfully attached to him. With these friends he was now meeting for the last time, on the very evening in which he was betrayed and seized. He perfectly knew all that was to befal him. He knew that this was the last meal in which he was to join with those who had been the companions of all his labours, the confidants of all his griefs; among whom he had passed all the quiet and private moments of his life. He knew that within a few hours he was to be torn from this loved society, by a band of ruffians; and by to-morrow, was to be publicly arraigned as a malefactor. With a heart melting with tenderness, he said to the twelve Apostles, as he sat down with them at table, *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before*

Luke, xxii. 15.

before I suffer. And then, having gratified himself for the last time in their society, and having instituted that commemoration of his death, which was to continue in the Christian church until the end of ages, he took a solemn and affectionate farewell of his friends, in the words of the Text; *I say unto you, that I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

As these words were uttered by our Lord, in the prospect of his sufferings; when preparing himself for death, and looking forward to a future meeting with his friends in heaven; let us, under this view, consider the sacrament, which he then instituted, as a preparation for all the sufferings of life, and, especially, a preparation for death. It is fit and proper, that such solemn prospects should enter into the service which we are this day to perform. We have no reason to imagine, that they will render it a gloomy service. A good and wise man is often disposed to look forward to the termination

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tion of life. The number of our days is determined by God; and certainly it will not tend to shorten their number, that we employ ourselves in preparing for death. On the contrary, while our days last, it will tend to make us pass them more comfortably, and more wisely. Let us now then, as if for the last time we were to partake of this sacrament, consider how it may serve to prepare us for the dying hour.

I. It is a high exercise of all those dispositions and affections, in which a good man would wish to die. He would surely wish to leave this world, in the spirit of devotion towards God, and of fellowship and charity with all his brethren on earth. Now these are the very sentiments, which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper inspires into the heart of every pious communicant. It includes the highest acts of devotion of which human nature is capable. It imports a lively sense of the infinite mercies of Heaven; of the gratitude we owe to that God, who, by the death of his

his Son, hath restored the forfeited happiness and hopes of the human race. It imports, the consecration of the soul to God; the entire resignation of ourselves, and all our concerns, into his hands; as to the God whom we serve and love; the guardian in whom we confide. *To thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear, I will worship towards thy holy temple.*

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Psalm xliii. 4.

Psalm v. 7.

These devout affections towards God are, on this occasion, necessarily accompanied with benevolent dispositions towards men. Our communion is not only with God, but with one another. In this solemn service, the distinction of ranks is abolished. We assemble in common before our great Lord, professing ourselves to be all members of his family, and children of the same Father. No feud, nor strife, nor enmity, is permitted to approach the sacred table. All within that hallowed space breathes peace, and concord,

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Matth. v. 23, 24.

cord, and love. *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* What can be more becoming men and Christians, than such sentiments of piety to the great Father of the universe; gratitude to the merciful Redeemer of mankind; and charity and forgiveness towards all our brethren? Is not this the temper in which a good man would wish to live; more especially is not this the frame of mind which will give both dignity and peace to his last moments? How discomposed and embittered will these important moments prove, if, with a mind soured by the remembrance of unforgiven injuries, with a breast rankled by enmity, with a heart alienated from God, and insensible to devotion, one be forced away from life?

CONTEMPLATE the manner in which our Blessed Lord died; which the service of this

this day brings particularly into your view. You behold him, amidst the extremity of pain, calm and collected within himself; possessing his spirit with all the serenity which sublime devotion and exalted benevolence inspire. You hear him, first, lamenting the fate of his unhappy country; next, when he was fastened to the cross, addressing words of consolation to his afflicted parent; and, lastly, sending up prayers, mixed with compassionate apologies for those who were shedding his blood. After all those exercises of charity, you behold him, in an act of devout adoration and trust, resigning his breath: *Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit.* —Can any death be pronounced unhappy, how distressful soever its circumstances may be, which is thus supported and dignified? What could we wish for more in our last moments, than with this peaceful frame of mind, this calm of all the affections, this exaltation of heart towards God, this diffusion of benevolence towards men, to bid adieu to the world?

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If, in such a spirit as this, we would all wish to die, let us think that now is the time to prepare for it, by seasonably cultivating this spirit while we live; by imbibing, in particular, from the holy sacrament, those dispositions and affections which we would wish to possess at our latest period. It is altogether vain to imagine, that when the hour of death approaches, we shall be able to form ourselves into the frame of mind which is then most proper and decent. Amidst the struggles of nature, and under the load of sickness or pain, it is not time for unaccustomed exertions to be made, or for new reformations to be begun. *Sufficient*, and more than sufficient, *for that day is the evil thereof.* It will be too late to assume then the hero, or the saint, if we have been totally unacquainted with the character before. The sentiments we would display, and the language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced and foreign to the heart. It is only in consequence of habits

habits acquired in former and better days, that a temper of piety and charity can grow up into such strength, as to confer peace and magnanimity on the concluding hours of life. Peculiarly favourable to the acquisition of such a temper, are the devotions of this day. In this view, let us perform them; and study to be, at the table of the Lord, what we would wish to be when the summons of death shall come.

II. This sacrament becomes a preparation for death, by laying a foundation for peace with God. What is important at the close of life, is not only the temper in which we leave the world, but the situation in which we stand with respect to that great Judge, before whom we are about to appear. This view of our situation is apt to escape us, during the ordinary course of life. Occupied with the affairs and concerns of this world; flattered by those illusive colours of innocence and virtue, in which self-love dresses up our character, apprehensions of guilt create

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little uneasiness to the multitude of men. But, on the approach of death, their ideas change. As the inquisition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remember transgressions crowd upon the mind. Guilt becomes strongly realized to the imagination; and alarms, before unknown, begin to arise. Hence that anxiety, in the prospect of a future invisible world, which is so often seen to attend the bed of death. Hence those various methods which superstition has devised for quieting this anxiety; the trembling mind eagerly grasping every feeble plank on which it can lay hold, and flying for protection to the most unavailing aid. The stoutest spirits have been then known to bend; the proudest hearts to be humbled. They who are now most thoughtless about their spiritual concerns, may, perhaps, be in this state before they die.

The dispensation of grace discovered in the gospel, affords the only remedy against those terrors, by the promise of pardon, extended to the penitent, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the very

very essence of this sacrament, to exhibit this promised grace to mankind; *My body which was broken for you; my blood shed for many for the remission of sins.* Here shines from above, the ray of hope. Divine justice, we are assured, is not inexorable. Divine mercy is accessible to all who believe and repent. The participation of this sacrament, therefore, naturally imparts comfort to the worthy communicant; as it supposes, on his part, a cordial compliance with those terms, on which pardon is offered by the gospel to mankind.

I mean not to say, that the participation of this sacrament, how pious and proper soever our dispositions at that time may be, is, of itself, sufficient to ensure us of comfort at death. It were unwarrantable to flatter Christians with hopes to this extent. No single act of the most fervent devotion can afford assured hopes of peace with Heaven, until these hopes be confirmed by the succeeding tenour of a good life. But what may safely be asserted is, that communicating in a proper

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manner, makes way for such hopes. It is an introduction to that state of reconciliation with God, which will give you peace in death. It is the beginning of a good course, which, if duly pursued, will make your latter end blessed. It is the entrance of *the path of the just;* the morning of that *light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* For this holy sacrament is a professed renunciation of the vices and corruptions of the world. It is a professed dereliction of former evil habits; a solemn return, on our part, to God and virtue, under the firm trust, that God will, through Jesus Christ, shew mercy to the frailties of the penitent. If you continue to support the character which you this day assume, the invisible world will no longer present to you a scene of terrors. You will be comforted with the view of goodness and compassion, as predominant in the administration of the universe. After having finished a virtuous course, you will be able to look up to that God whom you have worshipped, and to say, *I know in whom I have trusted.*

Though

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.

III. This sacrament prepares us for a happy death, by strengthening the connexion between Christians and Christ their Saviour. This is a connexion which, in various ways, redounds to their benefit; and will be found particularly consolatory at the hour of death. The awful Majesty of Heaven is in danger of overwhelming the mind, in the feeble moments of departing life. The reverence it inspires is mingled with sensations of dread, which might be too strong for us then to bear. When we look up to it, through a Mediator and Intercessor, that Majesty assumes a milder aspect, and appears to invite our approach. Whatever, therefore, forms a connexion with this great Mediator, this powerful friend and patron of the human race, must be most desirable to every one, especially to the dying man. Now, this sacrament unites us closely

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with him. It is the oath of our allegiance. It is the act of enlisting ourselves under the banner of this Divine Leader. Of course it strengthens our faith in him, as our guide through life, and our guardian and protector in death. It gives us a title to look up to him, under the confidence of that reciprocal engagement, which fidelity on the one hand is always understood to imply, of protection on the other.

His participation of our nature conveys a degree of encouragement, which we could derive from no being altogether celestial, how gracious or benign soever. In our utmost extremity, we can have recourse to his sympathising aid, who had experience both of the distresses of life, and of the terrors of death. We behold, in the Text, with what firm tranquillity he looked forward to his approaching sufferings. Sincere attachment to our great Master, may be expected to infuse into us some degree of the same happy composure of mind. It is owing to our losing out of view this perfect model; to our following

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the crowd, and adopting the common spirit of the world, that we become mean-spirited and base; servilely attached to life, and afraid to die. Did we, according to our engagements at the Lord's table, keep our eye fixed on our Divine Leader, and study to follow his steps, a portion of his spirit would descend upon us at the hour of death. It would be as the mantle of Elijah, falling on a chosen disciple; and would enable us, as it did Elisha of old, to smite and divide the waters.——We believe our Saviour now to rule in the world of spirits. The grave, therefore, bars not his followers from access to him. In the grave, for our sake, he once lay down, that he might dispel the gloom which appears to us to cover that formidable mansion. In a short time, he rose from it, in order to assure us, that the dark and narrow house was not to confine his followers for ever. By his death, he conquered death, and him that had the power of it; and his voice to us is, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hence, as long as we preserve that attachment

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tachment to him which we this day profess, we are furnished with a variety of considerations proper for supporting us in the prospect of our dissolution.—This leads me to observe,

IV. That the sacrament of which we are to partake, prepares us for death, by confirming and enlivening our hope of immortality. In this sacrament, my friends, you act for both worlds. As inhabitants of the earth, you are on this day to look forward, with care, to your future behaviour in it. For you are not, by any means, disengaging yourselves totally from this life and its concerns. On the contrary, you are forming, and even strengthening, those connexions, which virtue requires you to maintain with your friends and fellow-creatures around you.——At the same time, you are not to consider yourselves as citizens of earth only, but also as citizens of heaven. You are to recognize, on this occasion, your relation to a higher and better country, with which you are connected by the most sacred ties;

ties; and from which you derive those comforts and hopes, that will both purify your life, and render your death happy. The sacrament of the Supper is, in this view, an ascent of the mind above terrestrial things. At the Lord's table, we associate ourselves, in some degree, with spirits of a more exalted order. We declare, that we are tending towards their society; and have fixed our final rest within the veil. This view of the institution, so comfortable to the last period of life, is plainly given us in the words of the Text. For it is worthy of particular observation, that, as soon as our Lord had instituted this sacrament, he straightway leads the thoughts of his disciples to a state of future existence. Employing that metaphorical style, which the occasion naturally suggested, he tells them, that though he was not henceforth to drink of the fruit of the vine on earth, yet a day was coming, when he was again to drink it *with them;* to drink it, *in his Father's kingdom.* Two distinct ideas are, in these words, presented to us. One is, the abode

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abode into which our Saviour was to remove; *his Father's kingdom.* The other, the society which he was there to enjoy; *with you in my Father's kingdom.* These correspond to the two views under which death is most formidable to men; both of which he intended to banish, by the institution of this sacrament: First, that death is a transition to a new and unknown world; and next, that it is a final separation from all the friends whom we have loved on earth.

First; if death terminates our existence here, the abode to which it translates the faithful followers of Christ, is the kingdom of his Father. The institution of this sacrament dispels all the gloomy ideas of annihilation, of non-existence, of total darkness, which our imagination is ready to associate with the grave. We are here assured, that to good men, death is not the close of being, but a change of state; a removal, from a distant and obscure province of the universe, into the city of God, the chief seat of their

their Father's kingdom. They have every reason to believe, that the objects which are to meet them there, how new and unknown soever, shall all be propitious and friendly. For into the kingdom of his Father, their Lord has declared, that he is entered as their *forerunner. I go to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* What reasonings, what speculations, can have power to impart so much peace to the dying man, as a promise so direct and explicit, coming from Him who is truth itself, and cannot lie. *If it were not so, I would have told you.* The prospect becomes still more cheering and relieving, when we include

John, xiv. 2.

The other circumstances mentioned in the Text; the society to be enjoyed in that future state of being. *With you I shall drink of the fruit of the vine in my Father's kingdom.* In how amiable a light does

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does our Saviour here appear, looking forward to a future re-union with those beloved friends, whom he was now leaving, as to a circumstance which should increase both his own felicity and theirs, when they met again in a happier world! Thus, in the most affectionate manner, cheering their drooping and dejected spirits; and, by a similar prospect, providing for the comfort of his followers in future generations, when they should be about to leave the world.

The expressions in the Text plainly suggest a joyful intercourse among friends, who had been separated by death; and therefore seem to give much confirmation, to what has always been a favourite hope of good men; that friends shall know and recognise each other, and renew their former connexions, in a future state of existence. How many pleasing prospects does such an intimation open to the mind! How much does it tend to compensate the vanity of life, and to mitigate the sorrows of death! For it is not to be denied, that one of the most bitter circumstances attending

attending death, is the final separation from beloved friends. This is apt equally to wring the hearts of the dying, and the surviving; and it is an anguish of that sort, which descends most deeply into the virtuous and worthy breast. When surrounded with an affectionate family, and weeping friends, a good man is taking his last adieu of all whom he held most dear on earth; when, with a feeble voice, he is giving them his blessing, before he leaves them for ever; when, for the last time, he beholds the countenance, he touches the hand, he hears the voice, of the person nearest his heart; who could bear this bitterness of grief, if no support were to be ministered by religious hope? if there were no voice to whisper to our spirits, that hereafter we, and those whom we love, shall meet again in a more blissful land?——What higher view can possibly be given, of the benefit redounding from this Divine institution, than its affording us consolation in such situations of extreme distress, by realising to our souls the belief of an immortal state, in which all

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all the virtuous and worthy shall be reunited in the presence of their common Lord?

THUS I have set before you many considerations, arising from the sacrament of our Lord's Supper, which render it a proper preparation not only for a good life, but for a comfortable and happy death. The great improvement to be made of the subject is, to bring to the altar of God such dispositions of heart, as may give us ground to hope for this blessed effect. Let us approach to the sacrament with the same seriousness of frame, as if it were the last time we were ever to partake of it; as if we were now making provision for a journey to that land whence none return; as if we were never to *drink*, in this manner, *of the fruit of the vine, until that day when we drink it* with those whom we have loved *in our Father's kingdom.*——God only knows to whom this may be truly spoken! God knows who, of this assembly, shall never have opportunity to approach again to the sacred table,

table, and to meet with their brethren, on such an occasion, in the courts of the Lord's house!—Whatever our doom is to be, whether we are appointed for life or for death, such is the frame of mind which now best becomes, and will most improve us, in partaking of the holy sacrament.

Let me caution you, before I conclude, against judging of the propriety of your disposition in this solemn act of worship, solely by the warmth of your affections, and the fervour of your devotion. This state of heart, how desirable soever it may be, cannot be at all times possessed. It depends, in some measure, on natural sensibility. All are not equally endowed with warm and tender feelings. Even they who are susceptible of the highest degrees of pious and virtuous sensibility, cannot, on every occasion, command that happy temperature of mind. We are not, therefore, to judge unfavourably of ourselves, if this be not always the privilege of our devotions. It is chiefly a sedate

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and composed frame of spirit, that we must study to cultivate; arising from grave and sober thoughts; from serious and penitent recollection of past errors; from good purposes for the future; and from a deep sense of the approaching events of death and immortality. Penetrated with such dispositions, you have ground to come to the altar of God with humble trust and joy; under the belief, that you are approaching, through the great Redeemer, to that merciful Creator, to whom, *in the high and holy place of eternity*, the devout aspirations of his servants on earth are ever acceptable and pleasing.

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On the USE and ABUSE of the WORLD.

1 CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

—They that use this World, as not abusing it.—

THE world is always represented in Scripture as the great scene of trial to a Christian. It sets before him a variety of duties, which are incumbent on him to perform; and, at the same time, surrounds him with many dangers, against which he has to guard. The part which is proper for him to act, may be comprised in these two expressive words of the Text; *using the world, and not abusing it;* the significancy and extent of which, I propose now to explain. The subject is of the higher importance, as in the world

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we must live; and according as we use, or abuse it, it will prove either our friend, or our greatest foe.

It is natural to begin with observing, that the Christian is here supposed to *use the world;* by which we must certainly understand the Apostle to mean, maintaining intercourse and connection with the world; living in it, as one of the members of human society; assuming that rank which belongs to his station. No one can be said to *use the world*, who lives not thus. Hence it follows, that sequestration from the world is no part of Christian duty; and it appears strange, that even among those who approve not of monastic confinement, seclusion from the pleasures of society should have been sometimes considered, as belonging to the character of a religious man. They have been supposed to be the best servants of God, who, consecrating their time to the exercises of devotion, mingle least in the ordinary commerce of the world; and especially who abstain most rigidly from all that has the appearance of amusement.

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But how pious and sincere soever the intentions of such persons may be, they certainly take not the properest method, either for improving themselves, or for advancing religion among others. For, this is not using the world, but relinquishing it. Instead of making the light of a good example shine with useful splendour throughout the circle of society, they confine it within a narrow compass. According to the metaphor employed by our Saviour, after the *candle is lighted, they put it under a bushel.* Instead of recommending religion to the world, they exhibit it under the forbidding aspect of unnecessary austerity. Instead of employing their influence to regulate and temper the pleasures of the world, by a moderate participation of those that are innocent, they deliver up all the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and giddy.

The various dangers which the world presents to one who is desirous of maintaining his piety and integrity, have given rise to this scrupulous caution concerning

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the use of the world; and, so far, the principle is commendable. But we must remember, that the virtue of a Christian is to be shown, in surmounting dangers which he is called to encounter. Into the post of danger we were ordered by Providence, when we were brought into this world. We were placed as soldiers, on the field of battle. It is there that our fidelity to our great commander must appear. The most signal virtues which adorn and improve the human character, are displayed in active life. There, the strength of the mind is brought forth and put to the test. There, all the amiable dispositions of the heart find their proper exercise; humanity is cultivated; patience, fortitude, and self-denial, come forward in all their forms; and the light of good men's works so shine before others, as to lead them *to glorify their Father which is in heaven.*

It may be assumed, therefore, as a principle justified by the Text, and by the whole strain of Scripture, that *to use*, and in a certain degree to enjoy, *the world*, is altogether

altogether consistent with religion. According to the rank which men possess in society, according to their age, their employment, and connections, their intercourse with the world will be more or less extended. In private life, they use the world with propriety, who are active and industrious in their callings; just and upright in their dealings; sober, contented, and cheerful in their station. When the circumstances of men allow them a wider command of the enjoyments of the world, of those enjoyments they may freely partake, within the bounds of temperance, moderation, and decency. The highest situations of rank and opulence, ought to be distinguished by dignity of character; by extensive beneficence, usefulness, and public spirit; by magnificence, without ostentation; and generous hospitality, without profusion.

We shall have a clearer view of the proper use of the world, when we contrast it with that abuse of the world, which we too often observe. Those abuses manifest themselves in various forms; but in ge-

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neral may be classed under three great heads.

I. They are abusers of the world, who intemperately give themselves up to its pleasures, and lead a life of licentiousness, riot, and dissipation. Amidst the wealth and luxury of the present age, it will be admitted, that persons of this description are not unfrequent, who, being opulent in fortune, and perhaps high in rank, think themselves entitled to pass their days in a careless manner, without any other object in view, than the gratification of their senses and passions. It shall be granted, that they are not obliged to that exact œconomy and attention in their manner of living, which the state of fortune may require of others. Gaiety shall be permitted to them; change of scene, and variety of amusements. But let them not forget, that as men and members of society, not to say professors of the Christian faith, they are bound to stop short in their career of pleasure, as soon as it becomes disgraceful to themselves,

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and hurtful to the world. By the train of life which they lead, they defeat every purpose for which Providence bestowed on them the blessings of prosperity. They sink every talent which they possess, into useless insignificancy. They corrupt the public manners by their example; and diffuse among others the spirit of extravagance and folly. They behave in a manner altogether unsuitable to the condition of the world in which we live; where we are exposed to so much change, surrounded with so much distress, and daily behold so many affecting scenes, as ought to awaken serious reflection, and chasten dissolute mirth.

With indignant eyes, the sober and thinking part of mankind view the luxury and riot of those abusers of the world. To them are owing the discontents of the poor, their disaffection to their superiours, their proneness to disturb the peace of the world. When the poor behold wealth properly used, they look up with respect to them who possess it. They rest contented in their station, and bless the just and

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and the generous, from whose munificence they receive employment and reward. But when they behold those men of pleasure dissipating, in vice and folly, the fortune which their forefathers had honourably earned; when they behold them oppressing all their dependents, merely that they may revel in luxurious extravagance, then their hearts swell within them; with murmurs of sullen grief, they eye their own mean habitation, and needy family; and become prepared for robbery, tumult, sedition, and every evil work.

The conduct of such abusers of the world, is not only pernicious to the welfare of society, and to the interests of virtue; it is equally ruinous to themselves. I shall not insist on the loss of reputation, the waste of fortune, the broken health, and debilitated frame, which are the well-known consequences of a life of intemperate pleasure. I shall not recount all the better and more substantial enjoyments which they forfeit. Amidst the turbulence of riot, and the fumes of intoxication,

tion, unknown to them are the rational entertainments of regular life; the enjoyment of the face of nature; the pleasures of knowledge, and an improved mind; the pleasures of private friendship, and domestic society; the conscious satisfaction which accompanies honourable labours, and the justly-acquired esteem of those who surround them. All these they have thrown away; and in their room have substituted, what they think more high and vivid pleasures. But of what nature are those pleasures? *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.* Prov. xiv. 13.

At the bottom of the hearts of all men, there lies a secret sense of propriety, virtue, and honour. This sense may be so far blunted, as to lose its influence in guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains its power of making them feel that they are acting wrong. Hence remorse often gnaws the heart, which affects to appear light and gay before the world. Among the crowd of amusements, the voluptuary may endeavour to stifle his uneasiness; but

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but through all his defences it will penetrate. A conscious sense of his own insignificance, when he sees others distinguished for acting a manly and worthy part; reflection on the time he has wasted, and the contempt he has incurred; the galling remembrance of his earlier and better days, when he gave the fair promise of accomplishments, which now are blasted; have frequently been found to sadden the festive hour. The noise of merriment may be heard; but heaviness lies at the heart. While the tabret and the viol play, a melancholy voice sounds in his ears. The wasted estate, the neglected halls, and ruined mansions of his father, rise to view. The angry countenances of his friends seem to stare him in the face. A hand appears to come forth on the wall, and to write his doom.

Retreat, then, from your dishonourable courses, ye who, by licentiousness, extravagance, and vice, are abusers of the world! You are degrading, you are ruining yourselves. You are grossly misemploying the gifts

gifts of God; and the giver will not fail to punish. Awake to the pursuits of men of virtue and honour. Break loose from that magic circle, within which you are at present held. Reject the poisoned cup which the enchantress Pleasure holds up to your lips. Draw aside the veil which she throws over your eyes. You will then see other objects than you now behold. You will see a dark abyss opening below your feet. You will see virtue and temperance marking out the road, which conducts to true felicity. You will be enabled to discern, that the world is enjoyed to advantage, by none but such as follow those divine guides; and who consider pleasure as the seasoning, but not as the business, of life.

II. The world is abused, not only by an intemperate pursuit of its pleasures, but by a sordid attachment to its gains. This respects a set of men of very different description from the former, more decent in their carriage, and less flagrant in their vices; but corrupted by the world in no less a degree. For the world is often

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often abused by the men of business, as much as by the men of pleasure. When worldly success becomes the sole object of their life; when the accumulation of fortune so engrosses them as to harden their heart against every feeling of moral obligation; when it renders them insensible to the calls of affection, and to the impressions of piety and religion; they then come under the class of the covetous, whom, it is said, *the Lord abhorreth.*

Psalm x. 3.

The world, with its advantages, is a lawful object of pursuit to a Christian. He may seek, by fair industry, to render his circumstances affluent. Without reproof, he may aim at distinction and consideration in the world. He may bestow a considerable portion of his time and attention on the successful management of his worldly interest. All this is within the limits of that allowable use of the world, to which religion gives its sanction. But to a wise and good man, the world is only a secondary object. He remembers there is an eternity beyond it. His care is, not merely to amass and possess, but

but to use his possessions well, as one who is accountable to God. He is not a slave, either to the hopes, or the fears, of the world. He would rather forfeit any present advantage, than obtain it at the expence of violating the Divine law, or neglecting his duty. This is using the world like a good man. This is living in it, as a subject of God, and a member of the great community of mankind. To such a man, riches are a blessing. He may enjoy them with magnificence, but he will use them with liberality. They open a wide field to the exercise of his virtue, and allow it to shine with diffusive lustre.

Very opposite to this, is the character of the worldly-minded. To them, the mere attainment of earthly possessions is an ultimate aim. They cannot be said to *use the world;* for, to possess, not to use or enjoy, is their object. They are emphatically said in Scripture, to *load themselves with thick clay.* Some sort of apology may be framed for them who seek to extract from the world, pleasure of one kind or other. But for those who know

Habak. ii. 6.

no

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no pleasure, farther than *adding house to house, and field to field*, and calling them their own, it is hardly possible to frame any apology. Such persons are idolaters of the worst kind; for they have made the world their God. They daily worship and bow down before it; and hold nothing to be mean or base, which can promote the enlargement of their fortune.——He is an abuser of the world, let his possession of it be ever so ample, who knows nothing higher than the gains of the world. He is an abuser of the world, who sacrifices probity, virtue, or humanity, to its interests. He is an abuser of the world, who cannot occasionally retreat from it, to consider what character he bears in the sight of God; and to what issue his conduct will bring him at last. In a word, the world is then properly used, when it is generously and beneficially enjoyed; neither hoarded up by avarice, nor squandered by ostentation.

III. The world is abused, by those who employ its advantages to the injury or

or oppression of their brethren. Under this class are included, the worst and most criminal abusers of the world; who turn against their fellow-creatures, those advantages with which it has pleased Heaven to distinguish them. It is a class which comprehends, the sovereign who tyrannises over his people; the great man who depresses his dependents; the master who is cruel to his servants; every one, in fine, who renders his superiority of any kind, whether of wealth or power, unnecessarily grievous to those who are his inferiours: Whose superciliousness dejects the modest; whose insolence tramples on the poor; whose rigour makes the widow and the orphan weep. Persons of this character, while thus abusing the advantages of the world, may, for a while, enjoy their triumph. But let them not think, their triumph is always to last. Their turn shall come to be humbled as low as those whom they now oppress. For there is a vigilant eye in the heavens, attentive to observe their procedure. There is an impartial ear, which listens to every just

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complaint preferred against them. There is an irresistible arm stretched over their heads, whose weight they shall one day feel. The Sovereign of the universe characterises himself in the sacred writings, as peculiarly an adversary to the insolent and haughty. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right. He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker. The Lord will plead their cause; and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*

Psalm xii. 5.

Malachi, iii. 5.

Prov. xiv. 31.

Prov. xxii. 23.

After hearing these awful words, is it not strange, O men at once infatuated and cruel! that you cannot use the world without abusing it to the distress of your brethren? Even supposing no punishment to be threatened, no arm to be lifted up against you, is there nothing within you, that relents at the circumstances of those

those below you in the world? Is it not enough, that they suffer their own hard fate, without its being aggravated by your severity and oppression? Why must the aged, the poor, and the friendless, tremble at your greatness? Cannot you be happy, unless you make them eat their scanty morsel in bitterness of heart? You happy!—profane not the word—what is such happiness as yours, compared with that of him who could say, *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was a father to the poor. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.* How properly did such a man *use the world*, and with what just honour did he flourish in it! *Unto me men gave ear; they kept silence, and waited for my counsel. The princes refrained talking. The aged arose, and stood up. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay upon my*

Job, xxix 9—21.

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branch.——Not only unknown to you are such pleasures of virtuous prosperity; but, even previous to prepared punishment, be assured, that remorse is approaching to wring your hearts. Of the world, which you now abuse, in a short time nothing shall remain, but the horrour arising from remembered crimes. The wages you have detained, the wealth you have squeezed from the needy, shall lie heavy on your souls. The stately buildings which your pride has erected, by means of violence and oppression, shall seem haunted by injured ghosts. *The stone shall cry out of the wall; and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.* When you lie on the bed of death, the poor, whom you have oppressed, shall appear to you as gathered together; stretching forth their hands, and lifting up their voices against you, at the tribunal of Heaven. *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. But he passed away, and was not. I sought him, but he could not be found. They are brought down to desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed*

Habak. ii. 11.

Psalm xxxvii. 35; lxxiii. 19.

consumed with terrours. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

THUS I have shown what it is to *use*, and what to *abuse the world.* When, according to our different stations, we enjoy the advantages of the world with propriety and decency; temperate in our pleasures; moderate in our pursuits of interest; mindful of our duty to God, and, at the same time, just, humane, and generous to our brethren; then, and then only, we *use the world*, as becomes men, and Christians. Within these limits, we may safely enjoy all the comforts which the world affords, and our station allows. But if we pass beyond these boundaries, into the regions of disorderly and vicious pleasure, of debasing covetousness or of oppressive insolence, the world will then serve only to corrupt our minds, and to accelerate our ruin. The licentious, the avaricious, and the insolent, form the three great classes of abusers of the world.

Let not those who are in wealthy and flourishing circumstances, complain of the

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restraints which religious doctrine attempts to impose on their enjoyments. For, to what do these restraints amount? To no more than this, that, by their pleasures, they would neither injure themselves, nor injure others. We call not on the young, to relinquish their gaiety; nor on the rich, to forego their opulence; nor on the great, to lay aside their state. We only call on them, not to convert gaiety into licentiousness; not to employ opulence in mere extravagance; nor to abuse greatness for the oppression of their inferiours: While they enjoy the world, not to forget that they are the subjects of God, and are soon to pass into another state. Let the motive by which the Apostle enforces the exhortation in the Text, present itself to their thought; *Use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of the world passeth away.* Its pomp and its pleasures, its riches, magnificence, and glory, are no more than a transient show. Every thing that we here enjoy, changes, decays, and comes to an end. All floats on the surface of a river, which, with swift current, is running towards a boundless ocean. Beyond

Beyond this present scene of things, above those sublunary regions, we are to look for what is permanent and stable. The world passes away; but God, and heaven, and virtue, continue unchangeably the same. We are soon to enter into eternal habitations; and into these, our works shall follow us. The consequences shall for ever remain of the part which we have acted as good, or bad men; as faithful subjects of God, or as servants of a vain world.

SERMON XVII.

On Extremes in Religious and Moral Conduct.

Proverbs, iv. 27.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left.——

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Psalm ci. 2.

I Will behave myself wisely, said the Psalmist David, *in a perfect way.* Wisdom is no less necessary in religious, and moral, than in civil conduct. Unless there be a proper degree of light in the understanding, it will not be enough, that there are good dispositions in the heart. Without regular guidance, they will often err from the right scope. They will be always wavering and unsteady; nay, on some occasions, they may betray us into evil. This

This is too much verified by that propensity to run into extremes, which so often appears in the behaviour of men. How many have originally set out with good principles and intentions, who, through want of discretion in the application of their principles, have in the end injured themselves, and brought discredit on religion? There is a certain temperate mean, in the observance of which piety and virtue consist. On each side there lies a dangerous extreme. Bewildering paths open; by deviating into which, men are apt to forfeit all the praise of their good intentions; and to finish with reproach, what they had begun with honour. This is the ground of the wise man's exhortation in the Text. *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.* In discoursing from these words, I purpose to point out some of the extremes into which

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which men are apt to run in religion and morals; and to suggest directions for guarding against them.

With regard to religious principle in general, it may perhaps be expected, that I should warn you of the danger of being, on one hand, too rigid in adhering to it; and, on the other hand, too easy in relaxing it. But the distinction between these supposed extremes, I conceive to have no foundation. No man can be too strict in his adherence to a principle of duty. Here, there is no extreme. All relaxation of principle, is criminal. What conscience dictates, is to be ever obeyed. Its commands are universally sacred. Even though it should be misled, yet as long as we conceive it to utter the voice of God, in disobeying it we sin. The errour, therefore, to be here avoided is, not too scrupulous or tender regard to conscience, but too little care to have conscience properly enlightened, with respect to what is matter of duty and of sin.

sin.——Receive not, without examination, whatever human tradition has consecrated as sacred. Recur, on every occasion, to those great fountains of light and knowledge, which are opened to you in the pure word of God. Distinguish, with care, between the superstitious fancies of men, and the everlasting commandments of God. Exhaust not on trifles that zeal, which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. Overload not conscience, with what is frivolous and unnecessary. But when you have once drawn the line, with intelligence and precision, between duty and sin, that line you ought on no occasion to transgress.

Though there is no extreme in the reverence due to conscience, there may undoubtedly be an extreme in laying too much stress, either on mere principle, or on mere practice. Here we must take particular care, not to *turn to the right hand, nor to the left;* but to *hold faith and a good conscience* united, as the Scripture

1 Timothy, i. 19.

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ture, with great propriety, exhorts us. The errour of resting wholly on faith, or wholly on works, is one of those seductions, which most easily mislead men; under the semblance of piety on the one hand, and of virtue on the other. This is not an errour peculiar to our times. It has obtained in every age of the Christian church. It has run through all the different modes of false religion. It forms the chief distinction of all the various sects which have divided, and which still continue to divide, the church; according as they have leaned most to the side of belief, or to the side of morality.

Did we listen candidly to the voice of Scripture, it would guard us against either extreme. The Apostle Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own we can be justified; and that *without faith it is impossible to please God.* The Apostle James as clearly shows, that faith, if it be unproductive of good works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments, there is no opposition. Faith without works, is nugatory

nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain which sends forth no stream; a tree which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair but airy structure; without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand; the reed which shakes with every wind. You must join the two in full union, if you would exhibit the character of a real Christian. He who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interest of religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form, in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice; by the other, of running into impiety.

WHATEVER the belief of men be, they generally pride themselves in the possession

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sion of some good moral qualities. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. Without some pretence to virtue, there is no self-esteem; and no man wishes to appear, in his own view, as entirely worthless. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes, into which men run in their moral behaviour; resting their whole worth on that good quality, to which, by constitution or temper, they are most inclined.

One of the first and most common of those extremes, is that of placing all virtue, either in justice, on the one hand; or in generosity, on the other. The opposition between these, is most discernible among two different classes of men in society. They who have earned their fortune by a laborious and industrious life, are naturally tenacious of what they have painfully

painfully acquired. To justice they consider themselves as obliged; but to go beyond it in acts of kindness, they consider as superfluous and extravagant. They will not take any advantage of others, which conscience tells them is iniquitous; but neither will they make any allowance for their necessities and wants. They contend, with rigorous exactness, for what is due to themselves. They are satisfied, if no man suffer unjustly by them. That no one is benefited by them, gives them little concern.——Another set of men place their whole merit in generosity and mercy; while to justice and integrity they pay small regard. These are persons generally of higher rank, and of easy fortune. To them, justice appears a sort of vulgar virtue, requisite chiefly in the petty transactions which those of inferiour station carry on with one another. But humanity and liberality, they consider as more refined virtues, which dignify their character, and cover all their failings. They can relent at representations of distress;

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tress; can bestow with ostentatious generosity; can even occasionally share their wealth with a companion of whom they are fond; while, at the same time, they with-hold from others what is due to them; are negligent of their family and their relations; and to the just demands of their creditors give no attention.

Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. They divide moral virtue between them. Each takes that part of it only which suits his temper. Without justice, there is no virtue. But without humanity and mercy, no virtuous character is complete. The one man leans to the extreme of parsimony. The other to that of profusion. The temper of the one is unfeeling. The sensibility of the other is thoughtless. The one you may in some degree respect; but you cannot love. The other may be loved; but cannot be respected: and it is difficult to say, which character is most defective.—We must undoubtedly begin with being just, before

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we attempt to be generous. At the same time, he who goes no farther than bare justice, stops at the beginning of virtue. We are commanded to *do justly*, but to *love mercy*. The one virtue regulates our actions; the other improves our heart and affections. Each is equally necessary to the happiness of the world. Justice is the pillar, that upholds the whole fabric of human society. Mercy is the genial ray, which cheers and warms the habitations of men. The perfection of our social character consists, in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course, which admits of our being just, without being rigid; and allows us to be generous, without being unjust.

We must next guard against either too great severity, or too great facility of manners. These are extremes, of which we every day behold instances in the world. He who leans to the side of severity, is harsh in his censures, and narrow in his opinions. He cannot condescend to others in things indifferent. He has no

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allowance to make for human frailty; or for the difference of age, rank, or temper, among mankind. With him, all gaiety is sinful levity; and every amusement is a crime. To this extreme, the admonition of Solomon may be understood to belong: *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?* When the severity of manners is hypocritical, and assumed as a cloak to secret indulgence, it is one of the worst prostitutions of religion. But I now consider it, not as the effect of design, but of natural austerity of temper, and of contracted maxims of conduct. Its influence upon the person himself, is to render him gloomy and sour; upon others, to alienate them both from his society, and his counsels; upon religion, to set it forth as a morose and forbidding principle.—The opposite extreme to this is, perhaps, still more dangerous; that of too great facility, and accommodation to the ways of others. The man of this character, partly from indolent weakness, and partly from softness of temper, is disposed

Eccles. vii. 16.

posed to a tame and universal assent. Averse either to contradict or to blame, he goes along with the manners that prevail. He views every character with indulgent eye; and with good dispositions in his breast, and a natural reluctance to profligacy and vice, he is enticed to the commission of evils which he condemns, merely through want of fortitude to oppose others.

Nothing, it must be confessed, in moral conduct, is more difficult, than to avoid turning here, either *to the right hand, or to the left.* One of the greatest trials both of wisdom and virtue is, to preserve a just medium, between that harshness of austerity, which disgusts and alienates mankind, and that weakness of good nature, which opens the door to sinful excess. The one separates us too much from the world. The other connects us too closely with it; and seduces us to *follow the multitude in doing evil.* One who is of the former character, studies too little to be agreeable, in order to render himself useful. He who is of the latter, by

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studying too much to be agreeable, forfeits his innocence. If the one hurt religion, by clothing it in the garb of unnecessary strictness; the other, by unwarrantable compliance, strengthens the power of corruption in the world. The one borders on the character of the Pharisee; the other, on that of the Sadducee. True religion enjoins us to stand at an equal distance from both; and to pursue the difficult, but honourable aim, of uniting good-nature with fixed religious principle; affable manners, with untainted virtue.

FARTHER; we run to one extreme, when we contemn altogether the opinions of mankind; to another, when we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter betrays servility of spirit. We are formed by nature and Providence, to be connected with one another. No man can stand entirely alone, and independent of all his fellow-creatures. A reasonable regard, therefore,

fore, for their esteem and good opinion, is a commendable principle. It flows from humanity, and coincides with the desire of being mutually useful. But if that regard be carried too far, it becomes the source of much corruption. For, in the present state of mankind, the praise of the world often interferes with our acting that steady and conscientious part, which gains the approbation of God. Hence arises the difficulty of drawing a proper line, between the allowable regard for reputation, and the excessive desire of praise. On the one side, and on the other, danger meets us; and either extreme will be pernicious to virtue.

He who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind, suppresses one incentive to honourable deeds; nay, he removes one of the strongest checks on vice. For, where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach and shame; and when this sense is destroyed, the way is paved to open profligacy. On the other hand, he who is actuated solely by the love

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of human praise, encroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience, and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited; and many a splendid appearance has been exhibited to the world, which had no basis in real principle, or inward affection. Hence religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular taste. Hence the Scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, *because they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.*—Turn, therefore, neither to *the right hand, nor to the left.* Affect not to despise what the world thinks of your conduct and character; and yet, let not the sentiments of the world entirely rule you. Let a desire of esteem be one motive of your conduct; but let it hold a subordinate place. Measure the regard that is due to the opinions of men, by the degree in which these coincide with the law of God.

Allow me next to suggest, the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about

about worldly interests on the one hand, and of negligence on the other. It is hard to say which of these extremes is fraught with most vice and most misery. Industry and diligence are unquestionable duties, strictly enforced on all Christians; and he who fails in making suitable provision for his household and family, is pronounced to be *worse than an infidel.* But there are bounds, within which our concern for worldly success must be confined. For anxiety is the certain poison of human life. It debases the mind; and sharpens all the passions. It involves men in perpetual distractions, and tormenting cares; and leads them aside from what ought to be the great scope of human action. Anxiety is, in general, the effect of a covetous temper. Negligence is commonly the offspring of licentiousness, and always the parent of universal disorder. By anxiety, you render yourselves miserable. By negligence, you too often occasion the ruin of others. The anxious man is the votary of riches; the negligent man the votary of pleasure. Each offers his mis-

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taken worship, at the shrine of a false deity; and each shall reap only such rewards as an idol can bestow; the one sacrificing the enjoyment and improvement of the present, to vain cares about futurity, the other so totally taken up in enjoying the present, as to store the future with certain misery.——True virtue holds a temperate course between these extremes; neither careless of to-morrow, nor taking too much thought for it; diligent, but not anxious; prudent, but not covetous; attentive to provide comfortable accommodation on earth, but chiefly concerned to *lay up treasures in Heaven.*

I SHALL only warn you farther against the extreme of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of devoting yourselves to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action, and retreat. Our connections with society, and the performance of duties which we owe to one another, necessarily engage us in active life. What we owe to ourselves, requires occasional retirement.

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For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, cannot, it is to be feared, always preserve his virtue pure. Sentiments of piety will be deprived of that nourishment and support, which they would derive from meditation and devotion. His temper will be often ruffled and disturbed. His passions will be kept too much on the stretch. From the contagious manners which every-where abound, he will not be able to avoid contractings ome dangerous infection.——On the other hand, he who flies to total retreat, in order either to enjoy ease, or to escape from the temptations of the world, will often find disquiet meeting him in solitude, and the worst temptations arising from within himself. Unoccupied by active and honourable pursuits, unable to devote his whole time to improving thoughts, many an evil passion will start up, and occupy the vacant hour. Sullenness and gloom will be in danger of overwhelming him. Peevish displeasure, and suspicions of mankind, are apt to persecute those who withdraw themselves altogether from the haunts of men.

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men.——Steer therefore a middle course, between a life oppressed with business, on the one hand; and burdened, for the burden is no less, with idleness on the other. Provide for yourselves matter of fair and honest pursuit, to afford a proper object to the active powers of the mind. Temper business with serious meditation; and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry.

Thus I have pointed out some of those extremes into which men are apt to run, by forsaking the line which religion and wisdom have drawn. Many more, I am sensible, might be suggested; for the field is wide, and hardly is there any appearance of piety, virtue, or good conduct, but what the folly of men is apt to push into undue excess, on one or other side. What I have mentioned, will be sufficient to show the necessity of prudent circumspection, in order to escape the dangers which beset us in this state of trial. Let us study to attain a regular, uniform, consistent character; where nothing that is excessive

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or disproportioned shall come forward to view; which shall not plume itself with a fair show on one side only, while in other quarters it remains unadorned and blemished; but where the different parts of worth and goodness shall appear united, and each shall exert its proper influence on conduct. Thus, *turning neither to the right hand, nor to the left*, we shall, as far as our frailty permits, approach to the perfection of the human character; and shall have reason *not to be ashamed, when we have* equal *respect to all God's commandments.*

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On Scoffing at Religion.

2 Peter, iii. 3.

—There shall come in the last days Scoffers.—

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AS the Christian religion is adverse to the inclinations and passions of the corrupted part of mankind, it has been its fate, in every age, to encounter the opposition of various foes. Sometimes, it has undergone the storms of violence and persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the arms of false reasoning and sophistry. When these have failed of success, it has at other times been exposed to the scoffs of the petulant. Men of light and frivolous minds, who had no comprehension of thought for discerning what is great, and no solidity of judgment for deciding on what

what is true, have taken upon them to treat religion with contempt, as if it were of no consequence to the world. They have affected to represent the whole of that venerable fabric which has so long commanded the respect of mankind; which for ages the learned have supported, and the wise have admired, as having no better foundation than the gloomy imagination of fanatics and visionaries. Of this character were those *scoffers*, predicted by the Apostle to arise *in the last days;* a prediction which we have seen too often fulfilled. As the false colours, which such men throw on religion, are apt to impose on the weak and unwary, let us now examine, whether religion affords any just grounds for the contempt or ridicule of the scoffer. They must be either the doctrines, or the precepts, of religion, which he endeavours to hold forth to contempt.

The doctrines of the Christian religion are rational and pure. All that it has revealed concerning the perfections of God, his

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his moral government and laws, the destination of man, and the rewards and punishments of a future state, is perfectly consonant to the most enlightened reason. In some articles which transcend the limits of our present faculties, as in what relates to the essence of the Godhead, the fallen state of mankind, and their redemption by Jesus Christ, its doctrines may appear mysterious and dark. Against these the scoffer has often directed his attacks; as if whatever could not be explained by us, ought upon that account to be exploded as absurd.

It is unnecessary to enter, at present, on any particular defence of these doctrines, as there is one observation, which, if duly weighed, is sufficient to silence the cavils of the scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole system of nature around him is full of mystery? What reason, then, had he to suppose that the doctrines of revelation, proceeding from the same author, were to contain no mysterious obscurity? All that is requisite for the conduct of life, both in nature and

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in religion, Divine wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As nature has afforded us sufficient information concerning what is necessary for our food, our accommodation, and our safety; so religion has plainly instructed us in our duty towards God, and our neighbour. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards objects that lie beyond our immediate sphere of action, our curiosity is checked; and darkness meets us on every side. What the essence is of those material bodies which we see and handle; how a seed grows up into a tree; how man is formed in the womb; or how the mind acts upon the body, after it is formed; are mysteries of which we can give no more account, than of the most obscure and difficult parts of revelation. We are obliged to admit the existence of the fact, though the explanation of it exceeds our faculties.

After the same manner, in natural religion, questions arise concerning the creation of the world from nothing, the origin of evil under the government of a perfect Being, and the consistency of human li-

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berty with Divine prescience, which are of as intricate nature, and of as difficult solution, as any questions in Christian theology. We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the secrets of Providence, any more than into the mysteries of the Godhead. In all his ways, the Almighty is a *God that hideth himself. He maketh darkness his pavilion. He holdeth back the face of his throne; and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.*——Instead of its being any objection to revelation, that some of its doctrines are mysterious, it would be much more strange and unaccountable, if no such doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in the Christian system been perfectly level to our capacities, this might rather have given ground to a suspicion, of its not proceeding from God; since it would have been then so unlike to what we find, both in the system of the universe, and in the system of natural religion. Whereas, according as matters now stand, the gospel has the same features, the same general character, with the other two, which are acknowledged

ledged to be of divine origin; plain and comprehensible, in what relates to practice; dark and mysterious, in what relates to speculation and belief *. The cavils of the scoffer, therefore, on this head, are so far from having any just foundation, that they only discover his ignorance, and the narrowness of his views.

Let us next proceed to what relates to practice, or the preceptive part of religion. The duties which religion enjoins us to perform towards God, are those which have oftenest furnished matter to the scoffs of the licentious. They attempt to represent these as so idle and superfluous, that they could owe their birth to nothing but enthusiasm.—For, is not the Deity so far exalted above us, as to receive neither advantage nor pleasure from our worship? What are our prayers, or our praises, to that infinite mind, who, resting in the full enjoyment of his own beatitude, beholds

* See this argument fully pursued, and placed in a strong light, by the masterly hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion.*

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all his creatures passing before him, only as the insects of a day? What but superstitious terrors, could have dictated those forms of homage, and those distinctions of sacred days, in which vulgar minds delight, but which the liberal and enlarged look upon with scorn?

Now, in return to such insults of the scoffer, it might be sufficient to observe, that the united sentiments of mankind, in every age and nation, are against him. Thoughtless as the bulk of men are, and attached only to objects which they see around them; this principle has never been extinguished in their breasts, that to the great Parent of the human race, the universal, though invisible, benefactor of the world, not only internal reverence, but external homage, is due. Whether he need that homage or not, is not the question. It is what, on our part, we undoubtedly owe; and the heart is, with reason, held to be base, which stifles the emotions of gratitude to a benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any returns. True virtue always prompts a public

public declaration of the grateful sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over all the earth, crowds of worshippers have assembled to adore, in various forms, the Ruler of the world. In these adorations, the philosopher, the savage, and the saint, have equally joined. None but the cold and unfeeling can look up to that beneficent Being, who is at the head of the universe, without some inclination to pray, or to praise. In vain, therefore, would the scoffer deride, what the loud voice of nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general and declared sense of the human race.

But, apart from this consideration, I must call on him to attend to one of a still more serious and awful nature. By his licentious ridicule of the duties of piety, and of the institutions of divine worship, he is weakening the power of conscience over men; he is undermining the great pillars of society; he is giving a mortal blow to public order, and public happiness. All these rest on nothing so much,

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much, as on the general belief of an all-seeing witness, and the general veneration of an Almighty Governor. On this belief, and this veneration, is founded the whole obligation of an oath; without which, government could not be administered, nor courts of justice act; controversies could not be determined, nor private property be preserved safe. Our only security against innumerable crimes, to which the restraints of human life cannot reach, is the dread of an invisible avenger, and of those future punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this dread from the minds of men; and you strengthen the hands of the wicked, and endanger the safety of human society.

But how could impressions so necessary to the public welfare be preserved, if there were no religious assemblies, no sacred institutions, no days set apart for divine worship, in order to be solemn remembrancers to men of the existence and the dominion of God, and of the future account they have to give of their actions to him? To all ranks of men, the sentiments which

which public religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial. But with respect to the inferiour classes, it is well known, that the only principles which restrain them from evil, are acquired in the religious assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the advantages of regular education; ignorant, in great measure, of public laws; unacquainted with those refined ideas of honour and propriety, to which others of more knowledge have been trained; were those sacred temples deserted to which they now resort, they would be in danger of degenerating into a ferocious race, from whom lawless violence was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any degree of levity and scorn, is acting the part, perhaps without his seeing or knowing it, of a public enemy to society. He is precisely the *madman* described in the book of Proverbs, *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and saith, Am I not in sport?* We shall hear him, at times, complain loudly of the undutifulness of children, of the dishonesty

Proverbs xxvi. 18

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of servants, of the tumults and insolence of the lower ranks; while he himself is, in a great measure, responsible for the disorders of which he complains. By the example which he sets of contempt for religion, he becomes accessary to the manifold crimes, which that contempt occasions among others. By his scoffing at sacred institutions, he is encouraging the rabble to uproar and violence; he is emboldening the false witness to take the name of God in vain; he is, in effect, putting arms into the hands of the highwayman, and letting loose the robber on the streets by night.

We come next to consider that great class of duties, which respect our conduct towards our fellow-creatures. The absolute necessity of these to general welfare is so apparent, as to have secured them, in a great degree, from the attacks of the scoffer. He who would attempt to turn justice, truth, or honesty, into ridicule, would be avoided by every one. To those who had any remains of principle, he would

would be odious. To those who attended only to their interest, he would appear a dangerous man. But, though the social virtues are treated in general as respectable and sacred, there are certain forms and degrees of them which have not been exempted from the scorn of the unthinking. That extensive generosity, and high public spirit, which prompt a man to sacrifice his own interest, in order to promote some great general good; and that strict and scrupulous integrity, which will not allow one, on any occasion, to depart from the truth; have often been treated with contempt by those who are called men of the world. They who will not stoop to flatter the great; who disdain to comply with prevailing manners, when they judge them to be evil; who refuse to take the smallest advantage of others, in order to procure the greatest benefit for themselves; are represented as persons of romantic character, and visionary notions, unacquainted with the world, and unfit to live in it.

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Such persons are so far from being liable to any just ridicule, that they are entitled to a degree of respect, which approaches to veneration. For they are, in truth, the great supporters and guardians of public order. The authority of their character overawes the giddy multitude. The weight of their example retards the progress of corruption; checks that relaxation of morals, which is always too apt to gain ground insensibly, and to make encroachments on every department of society. Accordingly, it is this high generosity of spirit, this inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superiour to all opinion, which has ever marked the characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public life; who have patronized the cause of justice against powerful oppressors; who, in critical times, have supported the falling rights and liberties of men; and have reflected honour on their nation and country. Such persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived; but posterity has done them ample justice; and they

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are the persons, whose names are recorded to future ages, and who are thought and spoken of with admiration.

The mere temporizer, the man of accommodating principles, and inferiour virtue, may support a plausible character for a while among his friends and followers; but as soon as the hollowness of his principles is detected, he sinks into contempt. They who are prone to deride men of inflexible integrity, only betray the littleness of their minds. They show that they understand not the sublime of virtue; that they have no discernment of the true excellence of man. By affecting to throw any discouragement on purity and strictness of morals, they not only expose themselves to just contempt, but propagate sentiments very dangerous to society. For, if we loosen the regard due to virtue in any of its parts, we begin to sap the whole of it. No man, as it has been often said, becomes entirely profligate at once. He deviates, step by step, from conscience. If the loose casuistry of the scoffer were to prevail, open dishonesty, falsehood,

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hood, and treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying principles, those relaxations of virtue, which he would represent to be necessary for every man who knows the world.

THE last class of virtues I am to mention, are those which are of a personal nature, and which respect the government to be exercised over our pleasures and passions. Here, the scoffer has always considered himself as having an ample field. Often, and often, have such virtues, as sobriety, temperance, modesty, and chastity, been made the subject of ridicule, as monkish habits which exclude men from the company of the fashionable and the gay; habits, which are the effect of low education, or of mean spirits, or of mere feebleness of constitution; while scoffers, *walking*, as it is too truly said of them by the Apostle, *after their lusts*, boast of their own manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited. They fancy themselves raised thereby much above the crowd; and hold all those in contempt, who

who confine themselves within the vulgar bounds of regular and orderly life.

Infatuated men! who see not that the virtues of which they make sport, not only derive their authority from the laws of God, but are moreover essentially requisite both to public and to private happiness. By the indulgence of their licentious pleasures for a while, as long as youth and vigour remain, a few passing gratifications may be obtained. But what are the consequences? Suppose any individual to persevere unrestrained in this course, it is certainly to be followed by disrepute in his character, and disorder in his affairs; by a wasted and broken constitution; and a speedy and miserable old age. Suppose a society to be wholly formed of such persons as the scoffers applaud; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the sons of pleasure; that is, with the intemperate, the riotous, and dissolute, among whom all regard to sobriety, decency, and private virtue, was abolished; what an odious scene would such

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such a society exhibit? How unlike any civilized or well-ordered state, in which mankind have chosen to dwell? What turbulence and uproar, what contests and quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What man of common understanding would not rather chuse to dwell in a desert, than to be associated for life with such companions? Shall, then, the scoffer presume to make light of those virtues, without which there could be neither peace, nor comfort, nor good order, among mankind?

Let him be desired to think of his domestic situation and connexions. Is he a father, a husband, or a brother? Has he any friend or relation, male or female, in whose happiness he is interested?—— Let us put the question to him, whether he be willing that intemperance, unchastity, or dissipation of any kind, should mark their character? Would he recommend to them such excesses? Would he chuse, in their presence, openly, and without disguise, to scoff at the opposite virtues, as of no consequence to their welfare?

fare?—If even the most licentious shudder at the thought; if, in the midst of his loose pleasures, he be desirous that his own family should remain untainted; let this teach him the value of those private virtues, which in the hours of dissipation, in the giddiness of his mind, he is ready to contemn. Banish sobriety, temperance, and purity, and you tear up the foundations of all public order, and all domestic quiet. You render every house a divided and miserable abode, resounding with terms of shame, and mutual reproaches of infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human character. You change the man into a brute.

The conclusion from all the reasoning which we have now pursued is, that religion and virtue, in all their forms, either of doctrine or of precept; of piety towards God, integrity towards men, or regularity in private conduct; are so far from affording any grounds of ridicule to the petulant, that they are entitled to our highest veneration; they are names which should

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Proverbs, xiv. 9.

should never be mentioned, but with the utmost honour. It is said in Scripture, *Fools make a mock at sin.* They had better make a mock at pestilence, at war, or famine. With one who should chuse these public calamities for the subject of his sport, you would not be inclined to associate. You would fly from him, as worse than a fool; as a man of distempered mind, from whom you might be in hazard of receiving a sudden blow. Yet certain it is, that, to the great society of mankind, sin is a greater calamity, than either pestilence, or famine, or war. These operate, only as occasional causes of misery. But the sins and vices of men are perpetual scourges of the world. Impiety and injustice, fraud and falsehood, intemperance and profligacy, are daily producing mischief and disorder; bringing ruin on individuals; tearing families and communities in pieces; giving rise to a thousand tragical scenes on this unhappy theatre. In proportion as manners are vicious, mankind are unhappy. The perfection of virtue, which reigns in the world above, is the

the chief source of the perfect blessedness which prevails there.

When, therefore, we observe any tendency to treat religion or morals with disrespect and levity, let us hold it to be a sure indication of a perverted understanding, or a depraved heart. *In the seat of the scorner*, let us never sit Let us account that wit contaminated, which attempts to sport itself on sacred subjects. When the scoffer arises, let us maintain the honour of our God, and our Redeemer; and resolutely adhere to the cause of virtue and goodness. *The lips of the wise utter knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. Him that honoureth God, God will honour. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

SERMON XIX.

On the CREATION of the WORLD.

GENESIS, i. 1.

In the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.

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SUCH is the commencement of the history of mankind; an æra, to which we must ever look back with solemn awe and veneration. Before the sun and the moon had begun their course; before the sound of the human voice was heard, or the name of man was known; *in the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.*——To a beginning of the world, we are led back by every thing that now exists; by all history, all records, all monuments of antiquity. In tracing the transactions of past ages, we arrive at a period, which clearly indicates

indicates the infancy of the human race. We behold the world peopled by degrees. We ascend to the origin of all those useful and necessary arts, without the knowledge of which, mankind could hardly subsist. We discern society and civilization arising from rude beginnings, in every corner of the earth; and gradually advancing to the state in which we now find them: All which afford plain evidence, that there was a period, when mankind began to inhabit and cultivate the earth. What is very remarkable, the most authentic chronology and history of most nations, coincides with the account of Scripture; and makes the period during which the world has been inhabited by the race of men, not to extend beyond six thousand years.

To the ancient philosophers, creation from nothing appeared an unintelligible idea. They maintained the eternal existence of matter, which they supposed to be modelled by the sovereign mind of the universe, into the form which the earth now exhibits. But there is nothing in

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this opinion which gives it any title to be opposed to the authority of revelation. The doctrine of two self-existent, independent principles, God and matter, the one active, the other passive, is a hypothesis which presents difficulties to human reason, at least as great as the creation of matter from nothing. Adhering then to the testimony of Scripture, we believe, that *in the beginning God created*, or from non-existence brought into being, *the heaven, and the earth.*

But though there was a period when this globe, with all that we see upon it, did not exist, we have no reason to think, that the wisdom and power of the Almighty were then without exercise or employment. Boundless is the extent of his dominion. Other globes and worlds, enlightened by other suns, may then have occupied, they still appear to occupy, the immense regions of space. Numberless orders of beings, to us unknown, people the wide extent of the universe; and afford an endless variety of objects to the ruling care of the great Father of all. At length,

length, in the course and progress of his government, there arrived a period, when this earth was to be called into existence. When the signal moment, predestined from all eternity, was come, the Deity arose in his might; and with a word created the world.——What an illustrious moment was that, when, from non-existence, there sprang at once into being this mighty globe, on which so many millions of creatures now dwell!——No preparatory measures were required. No long circuit of means were employed. *He spake; and it was done: He commanded; and it stood fast.* The earth was, at first, *without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.* The Almighty surveyed the dark abyss; and fixed bounds to the several divisions of nature. He said, *Let there be light; and there was light.* Then appeared the sea, and the dry land. The mountains rose; and the rivers flowed. The sun and moon began their course in the skies. Herbs and plants clothed the ground. The air, the earth, and the waters, were

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stored with their respective inhabitants. At last, man was made after the image of God. He appeared, walking with countenance erect; and received his Creator's benediction, as the Lord of this new world. The Almighty beheld his work when it was finished; and pronounced it good. Superiour beings saw with wonder this new accession to existence. *The morning stars sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*

Job, xxxviii. 7.

But on this great work of Creation, let us not merely gaze with astonishment. Let us consider how it should affect our conduct, by presenting the divine perfections in a light which is at once edifying, and comforting to man. It displays the Creator as supreme in power, in wisdom, and in goodness.

I. As supreme in power. When we consider with how much labour and difficulty human power performs its inconsiderable works; what time it costs to rear them; and how easily, when reared, they are destroyed; the very idea of creating

power

power overwhelms the mind with awe. Let us look around, and survey this stupendous edifice, which we have been admitted to inhabit. Let us think of the extent of the different climates and regions of the earth; of the magnitude of the mountains, and of the expanse of the ocean. Let us conceive that immense globe which contains them, launched at once from the hand of the Almighty; made to revolve incessantly on its axis, that it might produce the vicissitudes of day and night; thrown forth, at the same time, to run its annual course in perpetual circuit through the heavens: After such a meditation, where is the greatness, where is the pride of man? Into what total annihilation do we sink, before an omnipotent Being? Who is not disposed to exclaim, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou shouldest visit him! When compared with thee, all men are vanity; their works are nothing!*——Reverence, and humble adoration, ought spontaneously to arise. He who feels no propensity to worship and

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adore, is dead to all sense of grandeur and majesty; has extinguished one of the most natural feelings of the human heart. *Know the Lord, that he is God, we are all his people: the workmanship of his hands. Let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Of all titles to legislation and rule, none is so evident and direct as that of a Creator. The conviction is felt in every breast, that he who gave us being, hath an absolute right to regulate our conduct. This gives a sanction to the precepts of God, which the most hardened dare not controvert. When it is a Creator and a Father that speaks, who would not listen and obey? Are justice and humanity his declared laws; and shall we, whom but yesterday he called from the dust, and whom to-morrow he can reduce into dust again, presume, in contempt of him, to be unjust or inhuman? Are there any little interests of our own, which we dare to erect, in opposition to the pleasure of him who made us? *Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at*

at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; who stretch forth my hand over the earth, and none hindereth?

At the same time, the power of a Creator is encouraging, as well as awful. While it enforces duty, it inspires confidence under affliction. It brings to view a relation, which imports tenderness and comfort; for it suggests the compassion of a Father. In the time of trouble, mankind are led, by natural impulse, to fly for aid to Him, who knows the weakness of the frame which he has made: who *remembers we are dust;* and sees the dangers with which we are environed. "I "am thine; for thou hast made me: For-"sake not the work of thine own hands," is one of the most natural ejaculations of the distressed mind.—How blessed are the virtuous, who can rest under the protection of that powerful arm, which made the earth and the heaven? The omnipotence which renders God so awful is to them a source of joy. In the whole com-

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pass of nature, nothing is formidable to them who firmly repose their trust in the Creator. To them, every noxious power can be rendered harmless; every threatened evil, if not averted, can be transformed into good. In the Author of nature, they find not only the author of their being; but their protector and defender, the lifter up of their heads. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever.*

Psalm cxlvi. 5, 6.

II. The work of creation is the display of supreme wisdom. It carries no character more conspicuous than this. If, from the structure and mechanism of some of the most complicated works of human art, we are led to high admiration of the wisdom of the contriver, what astonishment may fill our minds, when we think of the structure of the universe! It is not only the stupendous building itself, which excites admiration; but the exquisite skill, with which the endless variety of its parts

parts are adapted to their respective purposes: Insomuch that the study of nature, which, for ages, has employed the lives of so many learned men, and which is still so far from being exhausted, is no other than the study of divine wisdom displayed in the creation. The farther our researches are carried, more striking proofs of it every where meet us. The provision made for the constant regularity of the universe, in the disposition of the heavenly bodies, so that in the course of several thousand years, nature should ever exhibit the same useful and grateful variety in the returns of light and darkness, of summer and winter; and ever furnish food and habitation to all the animals that people the earth; must be a lasting theme of wonder to every reflecting mind.

But they are not only the heavens that *declare the glory of God, and the firmament that sheweth forth his handy-work.* In the most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of the Creator, consummate art and design appear. There is not a creature that moves, nor a vegetable

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table that grows, but, when minutely examined, furnishes materials of the highest admiration. The same wisdom that placed the sun in the centre of the system, and arranged the several planets around him in their order, has no less shown itself, in the provision made for the food and dwelling of every bird that roams the air, and every beast that wanders in the desert; equally great, in the smallest, and in the most magnificent objects; in the star, and in the insect; in the elephant, and in the fly; in the beam that shines from heaven, and in the grass that clothes the ground. Nothing is overlooked. Nothing is carelessly performed. Every thing that exists, is adapted, with perfect symmetry, to the end for which it was designed. All this infinite variety of particulars must have been present to the mind of the Creator; all beheld with one glance of his eye; all fixed and arranged, from the beginning, in his great design, when he formed the heavens and the earth. Justly may we exclaim with the Psalmist, *How excellent, O Lord, is thy name in all the*

the earth! How manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. No man can find out the work that God maketh, from the beginning to the end. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it.

This wisdom displayed by the Almighty in the creation, was not intended merely to gratify curiosity, and to raise wonder. It ought to beget profound submission, and pious trust, in every heart. It is not uncommon for many who speak with rapture of creating wisdom, to be guilty, at the same time, of arraigning the conduct of Providence. In the structure of the universe, they confess that all is goodly and beautiful. But, in the government of human affairs, they can see nothing but disorder and confusion.——Have they forgotten, that both the one and the other proceed from the same Author? Have they forgotten, that he who balanced all the heavenly bodies, and adjusted the proportions and limits of nature, is the same who hath allotted them their condition in the world, who distributes the measures

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measures of their prosperity and adversity, and *fixes the bounds of their habitation?* If their lot appear to them ill-sorted, and their condition hard and unequal, let them only put the question to their own minds, Whether it be most probable that the great and wise Creator hath erred in his distribution of human things, or that they have erred in the judgment which they form concerning the lot assigned to them? Can they believe, that the divine Artist, after he had contrived and finished this earth, the habitation of men, with such admirable wisdom, would then throw it out of his hands as a neglected work; would suffer the affairs of its inhabitants to proceed by chance; and would behold them, without concern, run into misrule and disorder? Where were then that consistency of conduct, which we discover in all the works of nature, and which we cannot but ascribe to a perfect Being?—— My brother! when thy plans are disappointed, and thy heart is ready to despair; when virtue is oppressed, and the wicked prosper around thee; in those moments

moments of disturbance, look up to Him who created the heaven and the earth; and confide, that he who made light to spring from primæval darkness, will make order at last to arise from the seeming confusion of the world.

Had any one beheld the earth in its state of chaos; when the elements lay mixed and confused; when the earth *was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep;* would he have believed, that it was presently to become so fair and well-ordered a globe as we now behold; illumined with the splendour of the sun, and decorated with all the beauty of nature? The same powerful hand, which perfected the work of creation, shall, in due time, disembroil the plans of Providence. Of creation, we can judge more clearly, because it stood forth at once; it was perfect from the beginning. But the course of Providence is progressive. Time is required for the progression to advance, and before it is finished, we can form no judgment, or at least a very imperfect one, concerning it. We must wait until the

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the great æra arrive, when the secrets of the universe shall be unfolded; when the divine designs shall be consummated; when Providence shall be brought to the same completion which creation has already attained. Then we have reason to believe, that the wise Creator shall appear, in the end, to have been the wise and just ruler of the world. Until that period come, let us be contented and patient; let us submit and adore. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.* This exhortation will receive more force, when we,

Job, xxxv. 14.

III. Consider creation as a display of supreme goodness, no less than of wisdom and power. It is the communication of numberless benefits to all who live, together with existence. Justly is the earth said to be *full of the goodness of the Lord.* Throughout the whole system of things, we behold a manifest tendency to promote the benefit either of the rational, or the animal creation. In some parts of nature, this

this tendency may be less obvious than in others. Objects, which to us seem useless or hurtful, may sometimes occur; and strange it were, if, in so vast and complicated a system, difficulties of this kind should not occasionally present themselves to beings, whose views are so narrow and limited as ours. It is well known, that in proportion as the knowledge of nature has increased among men, these difficulties have diminished. Satisfactory accounts have been given of many perplexing appearances. Useful and proper purposes have been found to be promoted, by objects which were, at first, thought unprofitable or noxious.

Malignant must be the mind of that person; with a distorted eye he must have contemplated creation, who can suspect, that it is not the production of infinite benignity and goodness. How many clear marks of benevolent intention appear every-where around us? What a profusion of beauty and ornament is poured forth on the face of nature? What a magnificent spectacle presented to the view of man?

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man? What supply contrived for his wants? What a variety of objects set before him, to gratify his senses, to employ his understanding, to entertain his imagination, to cheer and gladden his heart? Indeed, the very existence of the universe is a standing memorial of the goodness of the Creator. For nothing except goodness, could originally prompt creation. The Supreme Being, self-existent and all-sufficient, had no wants which he could seek to supply. No new accession of felicity or glory was to result to him, from creatures whom he made. It was goodness communicating and pouring itself forth, goodness delighting to impart happiness in all its forms, which in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Hence those innumerable orders of living creatures with which the earth is peopled; from the lowest class of sensitive being, to the highest rank of reason and intelligence. Wherever there is life, there is some degree of happiness; there are enjoyments suited to the different powers of feeling; and earth, and air, and water,

are with magnificent liberality made to teem with life.

Let those striking displays of creating goodness call forth, on our part, responsive love, gratitude, and veneration. To this great Father of all existence and life, to Him who hath raised us up to behold the light of day, and to enjoy all the comforts which his world presents, let our hearts send forth a perpetual hymn of praise. Evening and morning let us celebrate Him, who maketh the morning and the evening to rejoice over our heads; who *openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* Let us rejoice, that we are brought into a world, which is the production of infinite goodness, over which a supreme intelligence presides; and where nothing happens, that was not planned and arranged, from the beginning, in his decree. Convinced that he hateth not the works which he hath made, nor hath brought creatures into existence merely to suffer unnecessary pain, let us, even in the midst of sorrow, receive with calm submission

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whatever he is pleased to send; thankful for what he bestows; and satisfied, that without good reason he takes nothing away.

Such, in general, are the effects which meditation on the creation of the world ought to produce. It presents such an astonishing conjunction of power, wisdom, and goodness, as cannot be beheld without religious veneration. Accordingly, among all nations of the earth, it has given rise to religious belief and worship. The most ignorant and savage tribes, when they looked round on the earth and the heavens, could not avoid ascribing their origin to some invisible designing cause, and feeling a propensity to adore. They are, indeed, the awful appearances of the Creator's power, by which, chiefly, they have been impressed, and which have introduced into their worship so many rites of dark superstition. When the usual course of nature seemed to be interrupted, when loud thunder rolled above them in the clouds, or earthquakes shook the ground,

ground, the multitude fell on their knees, and, with trembling horrour, brought forth the bloody sacrifice to appease the angry divinity. But it is not in those tremendous appearances of power merely, that a good and well-instructed man beholds the Creator of the world. In the constant and regular working of his hands, in the silent operations of his wisdom and goodness, ever going on throughout nature, he delights to contemplate and adore him.

This is one of the chief fruits to be derived from that more perfect knowledge of the Creator, which is imparted to us by the Christian revelation. Impressing our minds with a just sense of his attributes, as not wise and great only, but as gracious and merciful, let it lead us to view every object of calm and undisturbed nature, with a perpetual reference to its Author. We shall then behold all the scenes which the heavens and the earth present, with more refined feelings, and sublimer emotions, than they who regard them solely as objects of curiosity or amusement. Nature will appear animated and enliv-

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ened, by the presence of its Author. When the sun rises or sets in the heavens, when spring paints the earth, when summer shines in its glory, when autumn pours forth its fruits, or winter returns in its awful forms, we shall view the Creator manifesting himself in his works. We shall meet his presence in the fields. We shall feel his influence in the cheering beam. We shall hear his voice in the wind. We shall behold ourselves everywhere surrounded with the glory of that universal spirit, who fills, pervades, and upholds all. We shall live in the world as in a great and august temple, where the presence of the divinity, who inhabits it, inspires devotion.

Magnificent as the fabric of the world is, it was not, however, intended for perpetual duration. It was erected as a temporary habitation for a race of beings, who, after acting there a probationary part, were to be removed into a higher state of existence. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for its creation, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution;

when the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and their place shall know them no more. The consideration of this great event, as the counterpart to the work of creation, shall be the subject of the following Discourse.

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On the DISSOLUTION of the WORLD.

2 PETER, iii. 10.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

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THESE words present to us an awful view of the final catastrophe of the world. Having treated, in the preceding Discourse, of the commencement, let us now contemplate the close, of all human things. The dissolution of the material system is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the Old Testament, clearly predicted in the New. It is an article of faith

faith so far from being incredible, that many appearances in nature lead to the belief of it. We see all terrestrial substances changing their form. Nothing that consists of matter, is formed for perpetual duration. Every thing around us is impaired and consumed by time, waxes old by degrees, and tends to decay. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that a structure so complex as the world must be liable to the same law; and shall, at some period, undergo the same fate Through many changes, the earth has already passed; many shocks it has received, and is still often receiving. A great portion of what is now dry land appears, from various tokens, to have been once covered with water. Continents bear the marks of having been violently rent, and torn asunder from one another. New islands have risen from the bottom of the ocean, thrown up by the force of subterraneous fire. Formidable earthquakes have, in divers quarters, shaken the globe; and at this hour terrify, with their alarms, many parts of it Burning moun-

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tains have, for ages, been discharging torrents of flame; and from time to time renew their explosions in various regions. All these circumstances show, that in the bowels of the earth the instruments of its dissolution are formed. To our view, who behold only its surface, it may appear firm and unshaken; while its destruction is preparing in secret. The ground on which we tread is undermined. Combustible materials are stored. The train is laid. When the mine is to spring, none of us can foresee.

Accustomed to behold the course of nature proceeding in regular order, we indulge meanwhile our pleasures and pursuits with full security; and such awful scenes as the convulsion of the elements, and the dissolution of the world, are foreign to our thoughts. Yet as it is certain that some generation of men must witness this great catastrophe, it is fit and proper that we should sometimes look forward to it. Such prospects may not, indeed, be alluring to the bulk of men. But they carry a grandeur and solemnity, which are congenial

genial to some of the most dignified feelings in our nature; and tend to produce elevation of thought. Amidst the circle of levities and follies, of little pleasures and little cares, which fill up the ordinary round of life, it is necessary that we be occasionally excited to attend to what is serious and great. Such events as are now to be the subject of our meditation, awake the slumbering mind; check the licentiousness of idle thought; and bring home our recollection to what most concerns us, as men and Christians.

Let us think what astonishment would have filled our minds, and what devout emotions would have swelled our hearts, if we could have been spectators of the creation of the world; if we had seen the earth when it arose at first, *without form and void*, and beheld its parts arranged by the divine word; if we had heard the voice of the Almighty, calling light to spring forth from the *darkness that was on the face of the deep;* if we had seen the sun rising, for the first time, in the east with majestic glory; and all nature instantly

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stantly beginning to teem with life. This wonderful scene, it was impossible that any human eye could behold. It was a spectacle afforded only to angels, and superiour spirits. But to a spectacle no less astonishing, the final dissolution of the world, we know there shall be many human witnesses. The race of men living in that last age, shall see the presages of the approaching fatal day. There shall be *signs in the sun*, as the Scripture informs us, *and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring.* They shall clearly perceive, that universal nature is tending to ruin. They shall feel the globe shake; shall behold their cities fall; and the final conflagration begin to kindle around them.——Realising then this awful scene; imagining ourselves to be already spectators of it; let us,

Luke, xxi. 25.

I. Contemplate the Supreme Being directing the dissolution, as he directed the original formation, of the world. He is the great agent in this wonderful transaction.

action. It was by him foreseen. It was by him intended; it entered into his plan from the moment of creation. This world was destined from the beginning to fulfil a certain period; and then its duration was to terminate. Not that it is any pleasure to the Almighty, to display his omnipotence in destroying the works which he has made; but as for wise and good purposes the earth was formed, so for wise and good ends it is dissolved, when the time most proper for its termination is come. He who, in the counsels of his Providence, brings about so many revolutions among mankind; who *changeth the times and the seasons;* who raises up empires to rule in succession among the nations, and at his pleasure puts an end to their glory; hath also fixed a term for the earth itself, the seat of all human greatness. He saw it meet, that after the probationary course was finished, which the generations of men were to accomplish, their present habitation should be made to pass away. Of the seasonableness of the period when this change should take place.

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place, no being can judge except the Lord of the universe. These are counsels, into which it is not ours to penetrate. But, amidst this great revolution of nature, our comfort is, that it is a revolution brought about by Him, the measures of whose government are all founded in goodness.

It is called in the Text, *the day of the Lord;* a day peculiarly his, as known to him only; a day in which he shall appear with uncommon and tremendous majesty. But though it be the day of the terrours of the Lord, yet from these terrours his upright and faithful subjects shall have nothing to apprehend. They may remain safe and quiet spectators of the threatening scene. For it is not to be a scene of blind confusion; of universal ruin, brought about by undesigning chance. Over the shock of the elements, and the wreck of matter, Eternal Wisdom presides. According to its direction, the conflagration advances which is to consume the earth. Amidst every convulsion of the world, God shall continue to be, as he was from the

the beginning, the *dwelling-place of his servants to all generations.* The world may be lost to them; but the Ruler of the world is ever the same, unchangeably good and just. This is the *high tower* to which they can fly, and be safe. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness;* and, under every period of his government, *his countenance beholdeth the upright.*

II. Let us contemplate the dissolution of the world as the end of all human glory. This earth has been the theatre of many a great spectacle, and many a high achievement. There, the wise have ruled, the mighty have fought, and conquerors have triumphed. Its surface has been covered with proud and stately cities. Its temples and palaces have raised their heads to the skies. Its kings and potentates, glorying in their magnificence, have erected pyramids, constructed towers, founded monuments, which they imagined were to defy all the assaults of time. *Their inward thought was, that their houses were*

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were to continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations. Its philosophers have explored the secrets of nature; and flattered themselves, that the fame of their discoveries was to be immortal.—— Alas! all this was to be no more than a transient show. Not only *the fashion of the world*, but the world itself, *passeth away*. The day cometh, when all the glory of this world shall be remembered only as *a dream when one awaketh*. No longer shall the earth exhibit any of those scenes which now delight our eyes. The whole beautiful fabric is thrown down, never more to arise. As soon as the destroying angel has sounded the last trumpet, the everlasting mountains fall; the foundations of the world are shaken; the beauties of nature, the decorations of art, the labours of industry, perish in one common flame. The globe itself shall either return into its ancient chaos, *without form and void;* or, like a star fallen from the heavens, shall be effaced from the universe, and *its place shall know it no more.*

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THIS day of the Lord, it is foretold in the Text, *will come as a thief in the night;* that is, sudden and unexpected. Mankind, notwithstanding the presages given them, shall continue to the last in their wonted security. Our Saviour tells us, that *as in the days of Noah before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*——How many projects and designs shall that day suddenly confound? What long contrived schemes of pleasure shall it overthrow? What plans of cunning and ambition shall it utterly blast? How miserable they, whom it shall overtake in the midst of dark conspiracies, of criminal deeds, or profligate pleasures? In what strong colours is their dismay painted, when they are represented, in the book of Revelations, as calling *to the hills and mountains to fall on them and cover them?*——Such descriptions are apt to be considered as exaggerated. The impression of those awful events is weakened by

Matthew, xxiv. 38.

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the great distance of time, at which our imagination places them. But have not we had a striking image set before us, in our own age, of the terrours which the day of the Lord shall produce, by those partial ruins of the world, which the visitation of God has brought on countries well known, and not removed very far from ourselves? When, in the midst of peace, opulence, and security, suddenly the earth was felt by the terrified inhabitants to tremble, with violent agitation, below them; when their houses began to shake over their heads, and to overwhelm them with ruins; the flood, at the same time, to rise from its bed, and to swell around them; when encompassed with universal desolation, no friend could aid another; no prospect of escape appeared; no place of refuge remained; how similar were such scenes of destruction to the terrours of the last day? What similar sensations of dread and remorse, and too late repentance, must they have excited among the guilty and profane?

To

To such formidable convulsions of nature, we, in these happy islands, through the blessing of Heaven, are strangers; and strangers to them may we long continue! But however we may escape partial ruins of the globe, in its general and final ruin we also must be involved. To us must come at last that awful day, when the sun shall for the last time arise, to perform his concluding circuit round the world. They how blest, whom that day shall find employed in religious acts, or virtuous deeds; in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life; in the exercise of due preparation for the conclusion of human things, and for appearing before the great Judge of the world! Let us now,

III. CONTEMPLATE the soul of man, as remaining unhurt in the midst of this general desolation, when the whole animal creation perishes, and the whole frame of nature falls into ruins. What a high idea does this present, of the dignity pertaining to the rational spirit! The world may fall back into chaos; but, superiour

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to matter, and independent of all the changes of material things, the soul continues the same. When *the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat*, the soul of man, stamped for immortality, retains its state unimpaired; and is capable of flourishing in undecaying youth and vigour. Very different indeed the condition of human spirits is to be, according as their different qualities have marked, and prepared them, for different future mansions. But for futurity, they are all destined. Existence, still, is theirs. The capacity of permanent felicity they all possess; and if they enjoy it not, it is owing to themselves.

Here, then, let us behold what is the true honour and excellence of man. It consists not in his body; which, beautiful or vigorous as it may now seem, is no other than a fabric of dust, quickly to return to dust again. It is not derived from any connection he can form with earthly things; which, as we have seen, are all doomed to perish. It consists in that thinking part, which is susceptible of intellectual

lectual improvement and moral worth; which was formed after the image of God; which is capable of perpetual progress in drawing nearer to his nature; and shall partake of the divine eternity, when time and the world shall be no more. This is all that is respectable in man. By this alone, he is raised above perishable substances, and allied to those that are celestial and immortal. This part of our nature, then, let us cultivate with care; and, on its improvement, rest our self-estimation. If, on the contrary, suffering ourselves to be wholly immersed in matter, plunged in the dregs of sensuality, we behave as if we were only made for the body and its animal pleasures, how degenerate and base do we become? Destined to survive this whole material system, sent forth to run the race of immortality and glory, shall we thus abuse our Maker's goodness, degrade our original honour, and sink ourselves into deserved misery? It remains, that,

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IV. We contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the introduction to a greater and nobler system, in the government of God. *We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* Temporal things are now to give place to things eternal. To this earthly habitation is to succeed the city of the living God. The earth had completed the purpose for which it was created. It had been employed as a theatre, on which the human generations were successively to come forth, and to fulfil their term of trial. As long as the period of trial continued, much obscurity was of course to cover the counsels of Providence. It was appointed, that *all things* should appear as *coming alike to all;* that the righteous should seem often neglected by Heaven, and the wicked be allowed externally to prosper; in order that virtue and piety might undergo a proper test; that it might be shown who were sincere adherents to conscience, and who were mere followers of fortune. The

2 Peter, iii. 13.

day

day which terminates the duration of the world, terminates all those seeming disorders. The time of trial is concluded. The final discrimination of characters is made. When the righteous go into everlasting happiness, and the wicked are dismissed into the regions of punishment, the whole mystery of human affairs is unravelled, and the conduct of Providence is justified to man.

Suited to a condition of trial was the state and form of the world, which we now inhabit. It was not designed to be a mansion for innocent and happy spirits; but a dwelling for creatures of fallen nature, and of mixed characters. Hence, those mixtures of pleasure and pain, of disorder and beauty, with which it abounds. Hence, some regions of the earth, presenting gay and pleasing scenes; others, exhibiting nothing but ruggedness and deformity; the face of Nature, sometimes brightened by a serene atmosphere, and a splendid sun; sometimes disfigured by jarring elements, and overcast with troubled skies. But far unlike shall be

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the everlasting habitations of the just. Though how they are formed, or what objects they contain, is not given us now to conceive; nor, in all probability, would our faculties be equal to the conception; the emblematical descriptions of them in Scripture are calculated to excite high ideas of magnificence and glory. This one particular we know with certainty, that *therein dwelleth righteousness;* that is, complete virtue and eternal order; and wherever these are found, the most perfect sources are opened of joy and bliss. This earth was never intended for more than the outer court, the porch, through which the righteous were to pass into the temple and sanctuary of the Divinity. *When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

THE inference which follows from what has been said on this subject, cannot be so well expressed as in the words of the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the Text; *Seeing that all these things*

things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Ought not the important discoveries which have been made to us of the designs of the Almighty, and of the destiny of man, to exalt our sentiments, and to purify our life from what is vicious or vain? While we pursue the business and cares of our present station, and partake of the innocent pleasures which the world affords, let us maintain that dignity of character, which becomes immortal beings; let us act with that circumspection which becomes those who know they are soon to stand before the judgment-seat of the Son of God: In a word, let us study to be what we would wish to be found, if to us the day of the Lord should come.

I KNOW it will occur, that the prospect of that day cannot be expected to have much influence on the present age. The events of which I have treated, must needs, it will be said, belong to some future race of

SERMON XX.

of men. Many prophecies yet remain to be fulfilled. Many preparatory events must take place, before the world is ripe for final judgment.—Whether this be the case or not, none of us with certainty know. ——But allow me to remind you, that to each of us an event is approaching, and not far distant, which shall prove of the same effect with the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of death is, to every individual, the same as the day of the dissolution of the world. The sun may continue to shine; but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is finally extinguished. The world may remain active, busy, and noisy; but to them all is silence. The voice which gives the mandate, *Return again to your dust*, is the same with the sound of the last trumpet. Death fixes the doom of every one, finally and irrevocably. This surely is an event which none of us can remove in our thoughts to a remote age. To-morrow, to-day, the fatal mandate may be issued. *Watch therefore; be sober and vigilant;*

ye

ye know not at what hour the Son of Man cometh SERMON XX.

HAVING now treated both of the creation and dissolution of the world, I cannot conclude without calling your thoughts to the magnificent view, which these events give us, of the kingdom and dominion of the Almighty. With reverence we contemplate his hand in the signal dispensations of Providence among men; deciding the fate of battles; raising up, or overthrowing empires; casting down the proud, and lifting the low from the dust. But what are such occurrences to the power and wisdom which He displays in the higher revolutions of the universe; by his word, forming or dissolving worlds; at his pleasure, transplanting his creatures from one world to another; that he may carry on new plans of wisdom and goodness, and fill all space with the wonders of creation? Successive generations of men have arisen to possess the earth. By turns they have passed away, and gone into regions unknown. Us he hath raised

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up, to occupy their room. We too shall shortly disappear. But human existence never perishes. Life only changes its form, and is renewed. Creation is ever filling, but never full. When the whole intended course of the generations of men shall be finished, then, as a shepherd leads his flock from one pasture to another, so the great Creator leads forth the souls which he has made, into new and prepared abodes of life. They go from this earth to a new earth, and new heavens; and still they remove, only from one province of the divine dominion to another. Amidst all those changes of nature, the great Ruler himself remains *without variableness or shadow of turning.* To him, these successive revolutions of being are but *as yesterday when it is past.* From his eternal throne, he beholds worlds rising and passing away; measures out, to the creatures who inhabit them, powers and faculties suited to their state; and distributes among them rewards and punishments proportioned to their actions. ——What an astonishing view do such meditations

meditations afford of the kingdom of God; infinite in its extent; everlasting in its duration; exhibiting, in every period, the reign of perfect righteousness and wisdom! *Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints!*

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